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PUBLISHER: *Joseph W. Ferman* EDITOR: *Ellery Queen*

Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine, Vol. 29, No. 3, Whole No. 160, MARCH, 1957. Published monthly by Mercury Publications, Inc., at 35c a copy. Annual subscription $4.00 in U.S.A. and possessions, Canada and the Pan American Union; $5.00 in all other countries. Publication office: Concord, N. H. Editorial and General offices, 527 Madison Ave., New York 22, N. Y. Entered as second class matter at the post office at Concord, N. H. under the act of March 3, 1879.

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a brand-new story by

AGATHA CHRISTIE

EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR:	AGATHA CHRISTIE
TITLE:	*Greenshaw's Folly*
TYPE:	Detective Story
DETECTIVE:	Miss Jane Marple
LOCALE:	England
TIME:	The Present
COMMENTS:	*The Folly, a monstrous white elephant of a house, was the perfect setting for an "impossible crime," complete with a new variation of the "locked room." Beware of Agatha Christie's justly famous ingenuity.*

THE TWO MEN ROUNDED THE CORNER of the shrubbery.

"Well, there you are," said Raymond West. "That's It."

Horace Bindler took a deep, appreciative breath.

"But my dear," he cried, "how wonderful." His voice rose in a high screech of esthetic delight, then deepened in reverent awe. "It's unbelievable. Out of this world! A period piece of the best."

"I thought you'd like it," said Raymond West, complacently.

"Like it? My dear—" Words failed Horace. He unbuckled the strap of his camera and got busy. "This will be one of the gems of my collection," he said happily. "I do think, don't you, that it's rather amusing to have a collection of monstrosities? The idea came to me one night seven years ago in my bath. My last real gem was in the Campo Santo at Genoa, but I really think this beats it. What's it called?"

"I haven't the least idea," said Raymond.

"I suppose it's got a name?"

"It must have. But the fact is that it's never referred to round here as anything but Greenshaw's Folly."

"Greenshaw being the man who built it?"

"Yes. In 1860 or '70 or thereabouts. The local success story of the time.

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Barefoot boy who had risen to immense prosperity. Local opinion is divided as to why he built this house, whether it was sheer exuberance of wealth or whether it was done to impress his creditors. If the latter, it didn't impress them. He either went bankrupt or the next thing to it. Hence the name, Greenshaw's Folly."

Horace's camera clicked. "There," he said in a satisfied voice. "Remind me to show you Number 310 in my collection. A really incredible marble mantelpiece in the Italian manner." He added, looking at the house, "I can't conceive of how Mr. Greenshaw thought of it all."

"Rather obvious in some ways," said Raymond. "He had visited the châteaux of the Loire, don't you think? Those turrets. And then, rather unfortunately, he seems to have traveled in the Orient. The influence of the Taj Mahal is unmistakable. I rather like the Moorish wing," he added, "and the traces of a Venetian palace."

"One wonders how he ever got hold of an architect to carry out these ideas."

Raymond shrugged his shoulders.

"No difficulty about that, I expect," he said. "Probably the architect retired with a good income for life while poor old Greenshaw went bankrupt."

"Could we look at it from the other side?" asked Horace, "or are we trespassing?"

"We're trespassing all right," said Raymond, "but I don't think it will matter."

He turned toward the corner of the house and Horace skipped after him.

"But who lives here, my dear? Orphans or holiday visitors? It can't be a school. No playing fields or brisk efficiency."

"Oh, a Greenshaw lives here still," said Raymond over his shoulder. "The house itself didn't go in the crash. Old Greenshaw's son inherited it. He was a bit of a miser and lived here in a corner of it. Never spent a penny. Probably never had a penny to spend. His daughter lives here now. Old lady—very eccentric."

As he spoke Raymond was congratulating himself on having thought of Greenshaw's Folly as a means of entertaining his guest. These literary critics always professed themselves as longing for a weekend in the country, and were wont to find the country extremely boring when they got there. Tomorrow there would be the Sunday papers, and for today Raymond West congratulated himself on suggesting a visit to Greenshaw's Folly to enrich Horace Bindler's well-known collection of monstrosities.

They turned the corner of the house and came out on a neglected lawn. In one corner of it was a large artificial rockery, and bending over it was a figure at the sight of which Horace clutched Raymond delightedly by the arm.

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"My dear," he exclaimed, "do you see what she's got on? A sprigged print dress. Just like a housemaid—when there were housemaids. One of my most cherished memories is staying at a house in the country when I was quite a boy where a real housemaid called you in the morning, all crackling in a print dress and a cap. Yes, my boy, *really*—a cap. Muslin with streamers. No, perhaps it was the parlormaid who had the streamers. But anyway she was a real housemaid and she brought in an enormous brass can of hot water. What an exciting day we're having."

The figure in the print dress had straightened up and turned toward them, trowel in hand. She was a sufficiently startling figure. Unkempt locks of iron-gray fell wispily on her shoulders and a straw hat, rather like the hats that horses wear in Italy, was crammed down on her head. The colored print dress she wore fell nearly to her ankles. Out of a weather-beaten, not too clean face, shrewd eyes surveyed them appraisingly.

"I must apologize for trespassing, Miss Greenshaw," said Raymond West, as he advanced toward her, "but Mr. Horace Bindler who is staying with me—"

Horace bowed and removed his hat.

"—is most interested in—er—ancient history and—er—fine buildings."

Raymond West spoke with the ease of a famous author who knows that he is a celebrity, that he can venture where other people may not.

Miss Greenshaw looked up at the sprawling exuberance behind her.

"It *is* a fine house," she said appreciatively. "My grandfather built it—before my time, of course. He is reported as having said that he wished to astonish the natives."

"I'll say he did that, ma'am," said Horace Bindler.

"Mr. Bindler is the well-known literary critic," said Raymond West.

Miss Greenshaw had clearly no reverence for literary critics. She remained unimpressed.

"I consider it," said Miss Greenshaw, referring to the house, "as a monument to my grandfather's genius. Silly fools come here and ask me why I don't sell it and go and live in a flat. What would *I* do in a flat? It's my home and I live in it," said Miss Greenshaw. "Always have lived here." She considered, brooding over the past. "There were three of us. Laura married the curate. Papa wouldn't give her any money, said clergymen ought to be unworldly. She died, having a baby. Baby died too. Nettie ran away with the riding master. Papa cut her out of his will, of course. Handsome fellow, Harry Fletcher, but no good. Don't think Nettie was happy with him. Anyway, she didn't live long. They had a son. He writes to me sometimes, but of course he isn't a Greenshaw. *I'm* the last of the Greenshaws." She drew up her bent

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shoulders with a certain pride, and readjusted the rakish angle of the straw hat. Then, turning, she said sharply:

"Yes, Mrs. Cresswell, what is it?"

Approaching them from the house was a figure that, seen side by side with Miss Greenshaw, seemed ludicrously dissimilar. Mrs. Cresswell had a marvelously dressed head of well blued hair towering upward in meticulously arranged curls and rolls. It was as though she had dressed her head to go as a French marquise to a fancy dress party. The rest of her middle-aged person was dressed in what ought to have been rustling black silk but was actually one of the shinier varieties of black rayon. Although she was not a large woman, she had a well-developed and sumptuous bosom. Her voice, when she spoke, was unexpectedly deep. She spoke with exquisite diction—only a slight hesitation over words beginning with "h" and the final pronunciation of them with an exaggerated aspirate gave rise to a suspicion that at some remote period in her youth she might have had trouble over dropping her h's.

"The fish, madam," said Mrs. Cresswell, "the slice of cod. It has not arrived. I have asked Alfred to go down for it and he refuses."

Rather unexpectedly, Miss Greenshaw gave a cackle of laughter.

"Refuses, does he?"

"Alfred, madam, has been most disobliging."

Miss Greenshaw raised two earth-stained fingers to her lips, suddenly produced an ear-splitting whistle and at the same time yelled, "Alfred. Alfred, come here."

Round the corner of the house a young man appeared in answer to the summons, carrying a spade in his hand. He had a bold, handsome face and as he drew near he cast an unmistakably malevolent glance toward Mrs. Cresswell.

"You wanted me, miss?" he said.

"Yes, Alfred. I hear you've refused to go down for the fish. What about it, eh?"

Alfred spoke in a surly voice.

"I'll go down for it if you wants it, miss. You've only got to say."

"I do want it. I want it for my supper."

"Right you are, miss. I'll go right away."

He threw an insolent glance at Mrs. Cresswell, who flushed and murmured below her breath.

"Now that I think of it," said Miss Greenshaw "a couple of strange visitors are just what we need, aren't they, Mrs. Cresswell?"

Mrs. Cresswell looked puzzled.

"I'm sorry, madam—"

"For you-know-what," said Miss Greenshaw, nodding her head. "Beneficiary to a will mustn't witness it. That's right, isn't it?" She appealed to Raymond West.

"Quite correct," said Raymond.

"I know enough law to know that," said Miss Greenshaw, "And you two are men of standing."

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She flung down the trowel on her weeding basket.

"Would you mind coming up to the library with me?"

"Delighted," said Horace eagerly.

She led the way through French windows and through a vast yellow and gold drawing-room with faded brocade on the walls and dust covers arranged over the furniture, then through a large dim hall, up a staircase, and into a room on the second floor.

"My grandfather's library," she announced.

Horace looked round with acute pleasure. It was a room from his point of view quite full of monstrosities. The heads of sphinxes appeared on the most unlikely pieces of furniture, there was a colossal bronze representing, he thought, Paul and Virginia, and a vast bronze clock with classical motifs of which he longed to take a photograph.

"A fine lot of books," said Miss Greenshaw.

Raymond was already looking at the books. From what he could see from a cursory glance there was no book here of any real interest or, indeed, any book which appeared to have been read. They were all superbly bound sets of the classics as supplied ninety years ago for furnishing a gentleman's library. Some novels of a bygone period were included. But they too showed little signs of having been read.

Miss Greenshaw was fumbling in the drawers of a vast desk. Finally she pulled out a parchment document.

"My will," she explained. "Got to leave your money to someone—or so they say. If I died without a will, I suppose that son of a horse coper would get it. Handsome fellow, Harry Fletcher, but a rogue if ever there was one. Don't see why *his* son should inherit this place. No," she went on, as though answering some unspoken objection, "I've made up my mind. I'm leaving it to Cresswell."

"Your housekeeper?"

"Yes. I've explained it to her. I make a will leaving her all I've got and then I don't need to pay her any wages. Saves me a lot in current expenses, and it keeps her up to the mark. No giving me notice and walking off at any minute. Very la-di-dah and all that, isn't she? But her father was a working plumber in a very small way. *She's* nothing to give herself airs about."

By now Miss Greenshaw had unfolded the parchment. Picking up a pen, she dipped it in the inkstand and wrote her signature, *Katherine Dorothy Greenshaw*.

"That's right," she said. "You've seen me sign it, and then you two sign it, and that makes it legal."

She handed the pen to Raymond West. He hesitated a moment, feeling an unexpected repulsion to what he was asked to do. Then he quickly scrawled his well-known autograph, for which his morning's mail usually brought at least six requests.

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Horace took the pen from him and added his own minute signature.

"That's done," said Miss Greenshaw.

She moved across to the bookcases and stood looking at them uncertainly, then she opened a glass door, took out a book, and slipped the folded parchment inside.

"I've my own places for keeping things," she said.

"*Lady Audley's Secret,*" Raymond West remarked, catching sight of the title as she replaced the book.

Miss Greenshaw gave another cackle of laughter.

"Best-seller in its day," she remarked. "But not like your books, eh?"

She gave Raymond a sudden friendly nudge in the ribs. Raymond was rather surprised that she even knew he wrote books. Although Raymond West was a "big name" in literature, he could hardly be described as a best-seller. Though softening a little with the advent of middle-age, his books dealt bleakly with the sordid side of life.

"I wonder," Horace demanded breathlessly, "if I might just take a photograph of the clock."

"By all means," said Miss Greenshaw. "It came, I believe, from the Paris Exhibition."

"Very probably," said Horace. He took his picture.

"This room's not been used much since my grandfather's time," said Miss Greenshaw. "This desk's full of old diaries of his. Interesting, I should think. I haven't the eyesight to read them myself. I'd like to get them published, but I suppose one would have to work on them a good deal."

"You could engage someone to do that," said Raymond West.

"Could I really? It's an idea, you know. I'll think about it."

Raymond West glanced at his watch.

"We mustn't trespass on your kindness any longer," he said.

"Pleased to have seen you," said Miss Greenshaw graciously. "Thought you were the policeman when I heard you coming round the corner of the house."

"Why a policeman?" demanded Horace, who never minded asking questions.

Miss Greenshaw responded unexpectedly.

"If you want to know the time, ask a policeman," she carolled, and with this example of Victorian wit she nudged Horace in the ribs and roared with laughter.

"It's been a wonderful afternoon," sighed Horace as they walked home. "Really, that place has *everything*. The only thing the library needs is a body. Those old-fashioned detective stories about murder in the library—that's just the kind of library I'm sure the authors had in mind."

"If you want to discuss murder," said Raymond, "you must talk to my Aunt Jane."

"Your Aunt Jane? Do you mean

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Miss Marple?" Horace felt a little at a loss.

The charming old-world lady to whom he had been introduced the night before seemed the last person to be mentioned in connection with murder.

"Oh, yes," said Raymond. "Murder is a speciality of hers."

"But my dear, how intriguing! What do you really mean?"

"I mean just that," said Raymond. He paraphrased: "Some commit murder, some get mixed up in murders, others have murder thrust upon them. My Aunt Jane comes into the third category."

"You are joking."

"Not in the least. I can refer you to the former Commissioner of Scotland Yard, several Chief Constables, and one or two hard-working inspectors of the C.I.D."

Horace said happily that wonders would never cease. Over the tea table they gave Joan West, Raymond's wife, Louise Oxley, her niece, and old Miss Marple, a résumé of the afternoon's happenings, recounting in detail everything that Miss Greenshaw had said to them.

"But I do think," said Horace, "that there is something a little *sinister* about the whole setup. That duchess-like creature, the housekeeper—arsenic, perhaps, in the teapot, now that she knows her mistress has made the will in her favor?"

"Tell us, Aunt Jane," said Raymond. "Will there be murder or won't there? What do *you* think?"

"I think," said Miss Marple, winding up her wool with a rather severe air, "that you shouldn't joke about these things as much as you do, Raymond. Arsenic is, of course, *quite* a possibility. So easy to obtain. Probably present in the tool shed already in the form of weed killer."

"Oh, really, darling," said Joan West, affectionately. "Wouldn't that be rather too obvious?"

"It's all very well to make a will," said Raymond, "I don't suppose the poor old thing has anything to leave except that awful white elephant of a house, and who would want that?"

"A film company possibly," said Horace, "or a hotel or an institution?"

"They'd expect to buy it for a song," said Raymond, but Miss Marple was shaking her head.

"You know, dear Raymond, I cannot agree with you there. About the money, I mean. The grandfather was evidently one of those lavish spenders who make money easily but can't keep it. He may have gone broke, as you say, but hardly bankrupt or else his son would not have had the house. Now the son, as is so often the case, was of an entirely different character from his father. A miser. A man who saved every penny. I should say that in the course of his lifetime he probably put by a very good sum. This Miss Greenshaw appears to have taken after him—to dislike spending money, that is. Yes, I should

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think it quite likely that she has quite a substantial sum tucked away."

"In that case," said Joan West, "I wonder now—what about Louise?"

They looked at Louise as she sat, silent, by the fire.

Louise was Joan West's niece. Her marriage had recently, as she herself put it, come unstuck, leaving her with two young children and a bare sufficiency of money to keep them on.

"I mean," said Joan, "if this Miss Greenshaw really wants someone to go through diaries and get a book ready for publication ... ."

"It's an idea," said Raymond.

Louise said in a low voice, "It's work I could do—and I think I'd enjoy it."

"I'll write to her," said Raymond.

"I wonder," said Miss Marple thoughtfully, "what the old lady meant by that remark about a policeman?"

"Oh, it was just a joke."

"It reminded me," said Miss Marple, nodding her head vigorously, "yes, it reminded me very much of Mr. Naysmith."

"Who was Mr. Naysmith?" asked Raymond, curiously.

"He kept bees," said Miss Marple, "and was very good at doing the acrostics in the Sunday papers. And he liked giving people false impressions just for fun. But sometimes it led to trouble."

Everybody was silent for a moment, considering Mr. Naysmith, but as there did not seem to be any points of resemblance between him and Miss Greenshaw, they decided that dear Aunt Jane was perhaps getting a *little* bit disconnected in her old age.

Horace Bindler went back to London without having collected any more monstrosities and Raymond West wrote a letter to Miss Greenshaw telling her that he knew of a Mrs. Louise Oxley who would be competent to undertake work on the diaries. After a lapse of some days a letter arrived, written in spidery old-fashioned handwriting, in which Miss Greenshaw declared herself anxious to avail herself of the services of Mrs. Oxley, and making an appointment for Mrs. Oxley to come and see her.

Louise duly kept the appointment, generous terms were arranged, and she started work the following day.

"I'm awfully grateful to you," she said to Raymond. "It will fit in beautifully. I can take the children to school, go on to Greenshaw's Folly, and pick them up on my way back. How fantastic the whole setup is! That old woman has to be seen to be believed."

On the evening of her first day at work she returned and described her day.

"I've hardly seen the housekeeper," she said. "She came in with coffee and biscuits at half-past eleven with her mouth pursed up very prunes and prisms, and would

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hardly speak to me. I think she disapproves deeply of my having been engaged." She went on, "It seems there's quite a feud between her and the gardener, Alfred. He's a local boy and fairly lazy, I should imagine, and he and the housekeeper won't speak to each other. Miss Greenshaw said in her rather grand way, 'There have always been feuds as far as I can remember between the garden and the house staff. It was so in my grandfather's time. There were three men and a boy in the garden then, and eight maids in the house, but there was always friction.'"

On the next day Louise returned with another piece of news.

"Just fancy," she said, "I was asked to ring up the nephew today."

"Miss Greenshaw's nephew?"

"Yes. It seems he's an actor playing in the stock company that's doing a summer season at Boreham-on-Sea. I rang up the theater and left a message asking him to lunch tomorrow. Rather fun, really. The old girl didn't want the housekeeper to know. I think Mrs. Cresswell has done something that's annoyed her."

"Tomorrow another installment of this thrilling serial," murmured Raymond.

"It's exactly like a serial, isn't it? Reconciliation with the nephew, blood is thicker than water—another will to be made and the old will destroyed.

"Aunt Jane, you're looking very serious."

"Was I, my dear? Have you heard any more about the policeman?"

Louise looked bewildered. "I don't know anything about a policeman."

"That remark of hers, my dear," said Miss Marple, "must have meant something."

—Louise arrived at her work the following day in a cheerful mood. She passed through the open front door —the doors and windows of the house were always open. Miss Greenshaw appeared to have no fear of burglars, and was probably justified, as most things in the house weighed several tons and were of no marketable value.

Louise had passed Alfred in the drive. When she first noticed him he had been leaning against a tree smoking a cigarette, but as soon as he had caught sight of her he had seized a broom and begun diligently to sweep leaves. An idle young man, she thought, but good-looking. His features reminded her of someone. As she passed through the hall on her way upstairs to the library, she glanced at the large picture of Nathaniel Greenshaw which presided over the mantelpiece, showing him in the acme of Victorian prosperity, leaning back in a large armchair, his hands resting on the gold Albert across his capacious stomach. As her glance swept up from the stomach to the face with its heavy jowls, its bushy eyebrows and its flourishing black mustache, the thought occurred to her that Nathaniel Green-

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shaw must have been handsome as a young man. He had looked, perhaps, a little like Alfred . . .

She went into the library on the second floor, shut the door behind her, opened her typewriter, and got out the diaries from the drawer at the side of her desk. Through the open window she caught a glimpse of Miss Greenshaw below, in a puce-colored sprigged print, bending over the rockery, weeding assiduously. They had had two wet days, of which the weeds had taken full advantage.

Louise, a town-bred girl, decided that if she ever had a garden it would never contain a rockery which needed weeding by hand. Then she settled down to her work.

When Mrs. Cresswell entered the library with the coffee tray at half-past eleven, she was clearly in a very bad temper. She banged the tray down on the table and observed to the universe:

"Company for lunch—and nothing in the house! What am *I* supposed to do, I should like to know? And no sign of Alfred."

"He was sweeping in the drive when I got here," Louise offered.

"I daresay. A nice soft job."

Mrs. Cresswell swept out of the room, slamming the door behind her. Louise grinned to herself. She wondered what "the nephew" would be like.

She finished her coffee and settled down to her work again. It was so absorbing that time passed quickly. Nathaniel Greenshaw, when he started to keep a diary, had succumbed to the pleasures of frankness. Typing out a passage relating to the personal charms of a barmaid in the neighboring town, Louise reflected that a good deal of editing would be necessary.

As she was thinking this, she was startled by a scream from the garden. Jumping up, she ran to the open window. Below her Miss Greenshaw was staggering away from the rockery toward the house. Her hands were clasped to her breast and between her hands there protruded a feathered shaft that Louise recognized with stupefaction to be the shaft of an arrow.

Miss Greenshaw's head, in its battered straw hat, fell forward on her breast. She called up to Louise in a failing voice: ". . . shot . . . he shot me . . . with an arrow . . . get help . . ."

Louise rushed to the door. She turned the handle, but the door would not open. It took her a moment or two of futile endeavor to realize that she was locked in. She ran back to the window and called down.

"I'm locked in!"

Miss Greenshaw, her back toward Louise and swaying a little on her feet, was calling up to the housekeeper at a window farther along.

"Ring police . . . telephone . . ."

Then, lurching from side to side like a drunkard, Miss Greenshaw disappeared from Louise's view

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through the window and staggered into the drawing-room on the ground floor. A moment later Louise heard a crash of broken china, a heavy fall, and then silence. Her imagination reconstructed the scene. Miss Greenshaw must have stumbled blindly into a small table with a Sèvres tea set on it.

Desperately Louise pounded on the library door, calling and shouting. There was no creeper or drainpipe outside the window that could help her to get out that way.

Tired at last of beating on the door, Louise returned to the window. From the window of her sitting-room farther along, the housekeeper's head appeared.

"Come and let me out, Mrs. Oxley. I'm locked in."

"So am I."

"Oh, dear, isn't it awful? I've telephoned the police. There's an extension in this room, but what I can't understand, Mrs. Oxley, is our being locked in. *I* never heard a key turn, did you?"

"No. I didn't hear anything at all. Oh, dear, what shall we do? Perhaps Alfred might hear us." Louise shouted at the top of her voice, "Alfred, Alfred."

"Gone to his dinner as likely as not. What time is it?"

Louise glanced at her watch.

"Twenty-five past twelve."

"He's not supposed to go until half-past, but he sneaks off earlier whenever he can."

"Do you think—do you think—"

Louise meant to ask "Do you think she's dead?"—but the words stuck in her throat.

There was nothing to do but wait. She sat down on the window sill. It seemed an eternity before the stolid helmeted figure of a police constable came round the corner of the house. She leaned out of the window and he looked up at her, shading his eyes with his hand.

"What's going on here?" he demanded.

From their respective windows, Louise and Mrs. Cresswell poured a flood of excited information down on him.

The constable produced a notebook and a pencil. "You ladies ran upstairs and locked yourselves in? Can I have your names, please?"

"Somebody locked us in. Come and let us out."

The constable said reprovingly, "All in good time," and disappeared through the French window below.

Once again time seemed infinite. Louise heard the sound of a car arriving, and, after what seemed an hour, but was actually only three minutes, first Mrs. Cresswell and then Louise were released by a police sergeant more alert than the original constable.

"Miss Greenshaw?" Louise's voice faltered. "What—what's happened?"

The sergeant cleared his throat.

"I'm sorry to have to tell you, madam," he said, "what I've already told Mrs. Cresswell here. Miss Greenshaw is dead."

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"Murdered," said Mrs. Cresswell. "That's what it is—murder."

The sergeant said dubiously, "Could have been an accident—some country lads shooting arrows."

Again there was the sound of a car arriving.

The sergeant said, "That'll be the M.O." and he started downstairs.

But it was not the M.O. As Louise and Mrs. Cresswell came down the stairs, a young man stepped hesitatingly through the front door and paused, looking round him with a somewhat bewildered air.

Then, speaking in a pleasant voice that in some way seemed familiar to Louise—perhaps it reminded her of Miss Greenshaw's—he asked, "Excuse me, does—er—does Miss Greenshaw live here?"

"May I have your name if you please," said the sergeant, advancing upon him.

"Fletcher," said the young man. "Nat Fletcher. I'm Miss Greenshaw's nephew, as a matter of fact."

"Indeed, sir, well—I'm sorry—"

"Has anything happened?" asked Nat Fletcher.

"There's been an—accident. Your aunt was shot with an arrow—penetrated the jugular vein—"

Mrs. Cresswell spoke hysterically and without her usual refinement: "Your h'aunt's been murdered, that's what's 'appened. Your h'aunt's been murdered."

Inspector Welch drew his chair a little nearer to the table and let his gaze wander from one to the other of the four people in the room. It was evening of the same day. He had called at the Wests' house to take Louise Oxley once more over her statement.

"You are sure of the exact words? *Shot—he shot me—with an arrow—get help?*"

Louise nodded.

"And the time?"

"I looked at my watch a minute or two later—it was then 12:25—"

"Your watch keeps good time?"

"I looked at the clock as well." Louise left no doubt of her accuracy.

The Inspector turned to Raymond West.

"It appears, sir, that about a week ago you and a Mr. Horace Bindler were witnesses to Miss Greenshaw's will?"

Briefly, Raymond recounted the events of the afternoon visit he and Horace Bindler had paid to Greenshaw's Folly.

"This testimony of yours may be important," said Welch. "Miss Greenshaw distinctly told you, did she, that her will was being made in favor of Mrs. Cresswell, the housekeeper, and that she was not paying Mrs. Cresswell any wages in view of the expectations Mrs. Cresswell had of profiting by her death?"

"That is what she told me—yes."

"Would you say that Mrs. Cresswell was definitely aware of these facts?"

"I should say undoubtedly. Miss Greenshaw made a reference in my

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presence to beneficiaries not being able to witness a will and Mrs. Cresswell clearly understood what she meant by it. Moreover, Miss Greenshaw herself told me that she had come to this arrangement with Mrs. Cresswell."

"So Mrs. Cresswell had reason to believe she was an interested party. Motive clear enough in her case, and I daresay she'd be our chief suspect now if it wasn't for, the fact that she was securely locked in her room like Mrs. Oxley here, and also that Miss Greenshaw definitely said a *man* shot her—"

"She definitely *was* locked in her room?"

"Oh, yes. Sergeant Cayley let her out. It's a big old-fashioned lock with a big old-fashioned key. The key was in the lock and there's not a chance that it could have been turned from inside or any hanky-panky of that kind. No, you can *take* it definitely that Mrs. Cresswell was locked inside that room and couldn't get out. And there were no bows and arrows in the room and Miss Greenshaw couldn't in any case have been shot from her window—the angle forbids it. No, Mrs. Cresswell's out."

He paused, then went on: "Would you say that Miss Greenshaw, in your opinion, was a practical joker?"

Miss Marple looked up sharply from her corner.

"So the will wasn't in Mrs. Cresswell's favor after all?" she said.

Inspector Welch looked over at her in a rather surprised fashion.

"That's a very clever guess of yours, madam," he said. "No. Mrs. Cresswell isn't named as beneficiary."

"Just like Mr. Naysmith," said Miss Marple, nodding her head. "Miss Greenshaw told Mrs. Cresswell she was going to leave her everything and so got out of paying her wages; and then she left her money to somebody else. No doubt she was vastly pleased with herself. No wonder she chortled when she put the will away in *Lady Audley's Secret*."

"It was lucky Mrs. Oxley was able to tell us about the will and where it was put," said the Inspector. "We might have had a long hunt for it otherwise."

"A Victorian sense of humor," murmured Raymond West.

"So she left her money to her nephew after all," said Louise.

The Inspector shook his head.

"No," he said, "she didn't leave it to Nat Fletcher. The story goes around here—of course I'm new to the place and I only get the gossip that's second-hand—but it seems that in the old days both Miss Greenshaw and her sister were set on the handsome young riding master, and the sister got him. No, she didn't leave the money to her nephew—" Inspector Welch paused, rubbing his chin. "She left it to Alfred," he said.

"Alfred—the gardener?" Joan spoke in a surprised voice.

"Yes, Mrs. West. Alfred Pollock."

"But why?" cried Louise.

Miss Marple coughed and mur-

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mured, "I would imagine, though perhaps I am wrong, that there may have been—what we might call *family* reasons."

"You could call them that in a way," agreed the Inspector. "It's quite well-known in the village, it seems, that Thomas Pollock, Alfred's grandfather, was one of old Mr. Greenshaw's bye-blows."

"Of course," cried Louise, "the resemblance!"

She remembered how after passing Alfred she had come into the house and looked up at old Greenshaw's portrait.

"I daresay," said Miss Marple, "that she thought Alfred Pollock might have a pride in the house, might even want to live in it, whereas her nephew would almost certainly have no use for it whatever and would sell it as soon as he could possibly do so. He's an actor, isn't he? What play exactly is he acting in at present?"

Trust an old lady to wander from the point, thought Inspector Welch; but he replied civilly, "I believe, madam, they are doing a season of Sir James M. Barrie's plays."

"Barrie," said Miss Marple thoughtfully.

"What Every Woman Knows," said Inspector Welch, and then blushed. "Name of a play," he said quickly. "I'm not much of a theatergoer myself," he added, "but the wife went along and saw it last week. Quite well done, she said it was."

"Barrie wrote some very charming plays," said Miss Marple, "though I must say that when I went with an old friend of mine, General Easterly, to see Barrie's *Little Mary—"* she shook her head sadly "—neither of us knew where to look."

The Inspector, unacquainted with the play *Little Mary,* seemed completely fogged.

Miss Marple explained: "When I was a girl, Inspector, nobody ever mentioned the word *stomach."*

The Inspector looked even more at sea. Miss Marple was murmuring titles under her breath.

"The Admirable Crichton. Very clever. *Mary Rose*—a charming play. I cried, I remember. *Quality Street* I didn't care for so much. Then there was *A Kiss for Cinderella.* Oh, of course!"

Inspector Welch had no time to waste on theatrical discussion. He returned to the matter at hand.

"The question is," he said, "did Alfred Pollock know the old lady had made a will in his favor? Did she tell him?" He added, "You see—there's an Archery Club over at Boreham—and *Alfred Pollock's a member.* He's a very good shot indeed with a bow and arrow."

"Then isn't your case quite clear?" asked Raymond West. "It would fit in with the doors being locked on the two women—he'd know just where they were in the house."

The Inspector looked at him. He spoke with deep melancholy.

"He's got an alibi," said the Inspector.

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"I always think alibis are definitely suspicious," Raymond remarked.

"Maybe, sir," said Inspector Welch. "You're talking as a writer."

"I don't write detective stories," said Raymond West, horrified at the mere idea.

"Easy enough to say that alibis are suspicious," went on Inspector Welch, "but unfortunately we've got to deal with facts." He sighed. "We've got three good suspects," he went on. "Three people who, as it happened, were very close upon the scene at the time. Yet the odd thing is that it looks as though none of the three could have done it. The housekeeper I've already dealt with; the nephew, Nat Fletcher, at the moment Miss Greenshaw was shot, was a couple of miles away filling up his car at a garage and asking his way; as for Alfred Pollock, six people will swear that he entered the Dog and Duck at twenty past twelve and was there for an hour having his usual bread and cheese and beer."

"Deliberately establishing an alibi," said Raymond West hopefully.

"Maybe," said Inspector Welch, "but if so, he *did* establish it."

There was a long silence. Then Raymond turned his head to where Miss Marple sat upright and thoughtful.

"It's up to you, Aunt Jane," he said. "The Inspector's baffled, the Sergeant's baffled, I'm baffled, Joan's baffled, Louise is baffled. But to you, Aunt Jane, it is crystal clear. Am I right?"

"I wouldn't say that," said Miss Marple, "not *crystal* clear. And murder, dear Raymond, isn't a game. I don't suppose poor Miss Greenshaw wanted to die, and it was a particularly brutal murder. Very well-planned and quite cold-blooded. It's not a thing to make *jokes* about."

"I'm sorry," said Raymond. "I'm not really as callous as I sound. One treats a thing lightly to take away from the—well, the horror of it."

"That is, I believe, the modern tendency," said Miss Marple. "All these wars, and having to joke about funerals. Yes, perhaps I was thoughtless when I implied that you were callous."

"It isn't," said Joan, "as though we'd known her at all well."

"That is *very* true," said Miss Marple. "You, dear Joan, did not know her at all. I did not know her at all. Raymond gathered an impression of her from one afternoon's conversation. Louise knew her for only two days."

"Come now, Aunt Jane," said Raymond, "tell us your views. You don't mind, Inspector?"

"Not at all," said the Inspector politely.

"Well, my dear, it would seem that we have three people who had—or might have thought they had—a motive to kill the old lady. And three quite simple reasons why none of the three could have done so. The housekeeper could not have killed Miss Greenshaw because she was locked in her room and because her

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mistress definitely stated that a *man* shot her. The gardener was inside the Dog and Duck at the time, the nephew at the garage."

"Very clearly put, madam," said the Inspector.

"And since it seems most unlikely that any outsider should have done it, where, then, are we?"

"That's what the Inspector wants to know," said Raymond West.

"One so often looks at a thing the wrong way round," said Miss Marple apologetically. "If we can't alter the movements or the positions of those three people, then couldn't we perhaps alter the time of the murder?"

"You mean that both my watch and the clock were wrong?" asked Louise.

"No, dear," said Miss Marple, "I didn't mean that at all. I mean that the murder didn't occur when you thought it occurred."

"But I *saw* it," cried Louise.

"Well, what I have been wondering, my dear, was whether you weren't *meant* to see it. I've been asking myself, you know, whether that wasn't the real reason why you were engaged for this job."

"What *do* you mean, Aunt Jane?"

"Well, dear, it seems odd. Miss Greenshaw did not like spending money—yet she engaged you and agreed quite willingly to the terms you asked. It seems to me that perhaps you were meant to be there in that library on the second floor, looking out of the window so that you could be the key witness—someone from outside of irreproachably good character—to fix a definite time and place for the murder."

"But you can't mean," said Louise, incredulously, "that Miss Greenshaw *intended* to be murdered."

"What I mean, dear," said Miss Marple, "is that you didn't really know Miss Greenshaw. There's no real reason, is there, why the Miss Greenshaw you saw when you went up to the house should be the same Miss Greenshaw that Raymond saw a few days earlier? Oh, yes, I know," she went on, to prevent Louise's reply, "she was wearing the peculiar old-fashioned print dress and the strange straw hat, and had unkempt hair. She corresponded exactly to the description Raymond gave us last weekend. But those two women, you know, were much the same age, height, and size. The housekeeper, I mean, and Miss Greenshaw."

"But the housekeeper is fat!" Louise exclaimed. "She's got an enormous bosom."

Miss Marple coughed.

"But my dear, surely, nowadays I have seen—er—them myself in shops most indelicately displayed. It is very easy for anyone to have a—a bosom—of *any* size and dimension."

"What are you trying to say?" demanded Raymond.

"I was just thinking that during the two days Louise was working

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there, one woman could have played both parts. You said yourself, Louise, that you hardly saw the housekeeper, except for the one minute in the morning when she brought you the tray with coffee. One sees those clever artists on the stage coming in as different characters with only a moment or two to spare, and I am sure the change could have been effected quite easily. That marquise headdress could be just a wig slipped on and off."

"Aunt Jane! Do you mean that Miss Greenshaw was dead before I started work there?"

"Not dead. Kept under drugs, I should say. A very easy job for an unscrupulous woman like the housekeeper to do. Then she made the arrangements with you and got you to telephone to the nephew to ask him to lunch at a definite time. The only person who would have known that this Miss Greenshaw was *not* Miss Greenshaw would have been Alfred. And if you remember, the first two days you were working there it was wet, and Miss Greenshaw stayed in the house. Alfred never came into the house because of his feud with the housekeeper. And on the last morning Alfred was in the drive, while Miss Greenshaw was working on the rockery—I'd like to have a look at that rockery."

"Do you mean it was Mrs. Cresswell who killed Miss Greenshaw?"

"I think that after bringing you your coffee, the housekeeper locked the door on you as she went out, then carried the unconscious Miss Greenshaw down to the drawing-room, then assumed her 'Miss Greenshaw' disguise and went out to work on the rockery where you could see her from the upstairs window. In due course she screamed and came staggering to the house clutching an arrow as though it had penetrated her throat. She called for help and was careful to say *'he* shot me' so as to remove suspicion from the housekeeper—from herself. She also called up to the housekeeper's window as though she saw her there. Then, once inside the drawing-room, she threw over a table with porcelain on it, ran quickly upstairs, put on her marquise wig, and was able a few moments later to lean her head out of the window and tell you that she, too, was locked in."

"But she *was* locked in," said Louise.

"I know. That is where the policeman comes in."

"What policeman?"

"Exactly—what policeman? I wonder, Inspector, if you would mind telling me how and when *you* arrived on the scene?"

The Inspector looked a little puzzled.

"At 12:29 we received a telephone call from Mrs. Cresswell, housekeeper to Miss Greenshaw, stating that her mistress had been shot. Sergeant Cayley and myself went out there at once in a car and arrived at the house at 12:35. We found Miss

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Greenshaw dead and the two ladies locked in their rooms."

"So, you see, my dear," said Miss Marple to Louise. "The police constable *you* saw wasn't a real police constable at all. You never thought of him again—one doesn't—one just accepts one more uniform as part of the Law."

"But who—why?"

"As to who—well, if they are playing *A Kiss for Cinderella,* a policeman is the principal character. Nat Fletcher would only have to help himself to the costume he wears on the stage. He'd ask his way at a garage, being careful to call attention to the time—12:25; then he would drive on quickly, leave his car round a corner, slip on his police uniform, and do his 'act'."

"But why—why?"

"*Someone* had to lock the housekeeper's door on the outside, and someone had to drive the arrow through Miss Greenshaw's throat. You can stab anyone with an arrow just as well as by shooting it—but it needs force."

"You mean they were both in it?"

"Oh, yes, I think so. Mother and son as likely as not."

"But Miss Greenshaw's sister died long ago."

"Yes, but I've no doubt Mr. Fletcher married again—he sounds like the sort of man who would. I think it possible that the child died too, and that this so-called nephew was the second wife's child, and not really a relation at all. The woman got the post as housekeeper and spied out the land. Then he wrote to Miss Greenshaw as her nephew and proposed to call on her—he may have even made some joking reference to coming in his policeman's uniform—remember, she said she was expecting a policeman. But I think Miss Greenshaw suspected the truth and refused to see him. He would have been her heir if she had died without making a will—but of course once she had made a will in the housekeeper's favor, as they thought, then it was clear sailing."

"But why use an arrow?" objected Joan. "So very far-fetched."

"Not far-fetched at all, dear. Alfred belonged to an Archery Club—Alfred was meant to take the blame. The fact that he was in the pub as early as 12:20 was most unfortunate from their point of view. He always left a little before his proper time and that would have been just right." She shook her head. "It really seems all wrong—morally, I mean, that Alfred's laziness should have saved his life."

The Inspector cleared his throat.

"Well, madam, these suggestions of yours are very interesting. I shall, of course, have to investigate—"

Miss Marple and Raymond West stood by the rockery and looked down at a gardening basket full of dying vegetation.

Miss Marple murmured:

"Alyssum, saxifrage, cystis, thimble campanula . . . Yes, that's all the

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proof *I* need. Whoever was weeding here yesterday morning was no gardener—she pulled up plants as well as weeds. So now I *know* I'm right. Thank you, dear Raymond, for bringing me here. I wanted to see the place for myself."

She and Raymond both looked up at the outrageous pile of Greenshaw's Folly.

A cough made them turn. A handsome young man was also looking at the monstrous house.

"Plaguey big place," he said. "Too big for nowadays—or so they say. I dunno about that. If I won a football pool and made a lot of money, that's the kind of house I'd like to build."

He smiled bashfully at them, then rumpled his hair.

"Reckon I can say so now—that there house was built by my great-grandfather," said Alfred Pollock. "And a fine house it is, for all they call it Greenshaw's Folly!"

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **GEORGE HARMON COXE**

TITLE: ***Cause for Suspicion***

TYPE: Detective Story

DETECTIVE: Dr. Paul Standish

LOCALE: A city in the United States

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *The overdose of sleeping pills was "kind of an accident" — at least, that's what Arlene Walton claimed. But to Dr. Standish, medical examiner, it was only the first "accident."*

THE FIRST NIGHT THAT DR. STANDish went to Arlene Walton's apartment, he went not as the medical examiner but as Paul Standish, M.D. At that, it was a near thing. Any great delay in finding her and he might well have been called in his official capacity. But as it was, the switchboard operator at the Belmont Arms, a youth by the name of Klein, remembered that Dr. Standish lived close by.

Klein's phoned diagnosis had saved a lot of time:

"It looks like she took an overdose of sleeping tablets," he said. "Can you come right away, Doc?"

The Belmont Arms was only a block and a half away, and Standish made the foyer in three minutes. Klein was holding the elevator.

"She's still alive," he said. He said other things on the way to the third floor and down the hall to the room at the end. But Paul Standish wasn't listening, nor was he more than vaguely aware of the two men beside the studio couch.

All he saw was the woman, a small figure in a blue house coat, her chestnut hair spread across the pillow. Noting her color and the bottle of pills on the end table, he examined her eyes, checked her pulse, and prepared his hypodermic.

He called over his shoulder to or-

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der an ambulance, and heard someone talking on the telephone; then he was injecting a massive dose of amphetamine sulfate intravenously.

"Will she live, Doctor?"

Paul Standish stepped away from the couch. There was a film of moisture on his lean, well-boned face, for the night was warm and the room was heavy with a gardenia-like scent.

"Yes," he said. "She'll live."

The man let his breath out in a whistling sound and sank into a chair. Standish saw that he was a short, stocky fellow of perhaps twenty-eight, with curly reddish hair and a solid rocky jaw.

"Who found her?" Standish glanced at the second man, who stood two or three inches taller than the doctor's own six feet and looked immaculate in his dinner jacket.

"I guess I got here about five minutes after they did."

"We found her," the stocky man said. "Billy and me." He indicated young Klein.

His name, he said, was Harry Gibney. He was a friend of Arlene Walton's and lived on the top floor, and he had knocked at her door around eight thirty. When he got no answer, he had gone upstairs. At ten forty he had telephoned her, and then asked Billy Klein if he knew where she was.

"Billy said she had come up at seven," Gibney said, "and he hadn't seen her go out. Yet she didn't answer her phone. I got scared."

"So did I." Klein was standing in the doorway. "Mr. Gibney said I should get a key and see if anything was wrong. I met him outside, and we came in and found her like that."

Paul Standish had been moving about the room as the others talked, and now he examined the half-filled bottle of tablets, noting the date the prescription had been filled.

"She didn't leave any note?"

Gibney glanced at Billy Klein. He shook his head. "No," he said. "I didn't see any."

Standish brought his gaze back to the tall man. He asked if he hadn't seen the other somewhere and the man smiled.

"Probably," he said. "I'm Victor Keenan. I have the orchestra at Castle Inn. . . . I phoned Arlene at ten thirty," he said, when Standish nodded. "She told me she'd be in tonight, and the boy here"—he indicated young Klein—"said he didn't know why she didn't answer. So I had one of my men take over the band and came right out. They were calling you when I came in and saw her."

Standish moved to the woman, finding her pulse improved. He asked, "What was her trouble?"

The silence that followed was abrupt, and he sensed an odd tension in the room where none had been before. He turned, his glance taking in Keenan and Gibney.

The two men were staring at each other, their animosity unmistakable. Gibney was learning forward in his

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chair, his rocky jaw set, his mouth tight, his eyes hard with hatred. Keenan's manner seemed more defiant than aggressive.

"We used to go together," he said, turning finally to Standish. "I—I broke it off last week. I got engaged to someone else. I didn't think she would—"

He did not finish, because Gibney cut in on him, speaking through his teeth. What he said was not distinct but its cadence was profane and he might have said more if steps in the hall had not announced an intern and ambulance attendants.

Standish told the intern that he would be along presently. Victor Keenan said if there was nothing he could do he would get back to his band, and went away with Billy Klein. Harry Gibney lingered in the doorway, his brown eyes anxious.

"You're sure she'll be all right, Doctor? . . . When can I see her?"

"Tomorrow afternoon should be all right," Standish said, and waited until the other started down the hall before stepping back into the room for a final look around. He saw now that the furnishings were colorful but cheap, like the building itself. He went to the couch, examined the floor around it and behind it. When he was sure there was no suicide note he went out.

In the main foyer a man was leaning over the switchboard talking to Billy Klein, a short, round-bodied man in a black homburg. The doctor recognized the florid, heavy face, though the name escaped him until young Klein spoke.

"Mr. Cormack was just asking about Miss Walton. . . . This is Dr. Standish," he said.

"Oh, yes," Cormack said. He shook his head and looked grieved. "From what the boy tells me, I guess it's lucky you got here when you did, Doctor. I've been worried about Arlene," he said and shook his head again, "but I never dreamed she'd try suicide."

Standish placed Cormack now as a politician of sorts who had worked his way from ward heeler to building commissioner and was now exploring greener fields. He replied perfunctorily to Cormack's questions, wondering casually why the man should be calling at this hour, but otherwise uninterested. And since there was nothing unusual in the incident, he thought nothing more about Edward Cormack—until later.

Arlene Walton was sitting up in bed when Paul Standish stopped at the hospital the following afternoon, and she had company.

"You can't talk like that to me," Arlene was saying with some asperity. "I've told you before how it was, and that's the way it's got to be."

The object of the lecture was Harry Gibney. When he glanced round and saw Standish, the tightness was still in his face, and so was the flush in his cheeks. He accepted Standish's apology with ill-concealed truculence.

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"It's okay, Doc," he said flatly. "I was just leaving. . . . So long," he said to the girl, "but don't get the idea I've finished."

Arlene Walton stared at the door long after it had closed, and Standish, seeing how upset she was, examined her chart.

"You had a close one," he said. "It was a silly thing to do. Been having trouble with the boy friend?"

"I've always had trouble with Harry. But not the kind you mean. What happened wasn't on his account. And anyway," she added, "it was kind of an accident."

Standish smiled crookedly, his eyes wise. "You had a headache and took a couple of pills and later you woke up and forgot you took them and swallowed some more." He shook his head. "The trouble with that story is that the prescription was filled three days ago and half the bottle was gone."

She lowered her glance, color showing in her face. She was quite tiny, lying there in bed, not more than five feet one, but with a certain voluptuousness for all of that. About twenty-six, Standish thought, though she looked older, with good features and a face that was pretty in spite of the tiredness around the hazel eyes and the slackness of skin beneath the chin. When he found her watching him, he said:

"What do you do—for a living?"

"I'm a manicurist."

"And before that?"

She moved her shoulders. "Oh—this and that." She hesitated, continued softly, "I guess I should be grateful to you."

"To Gibney and Billy Klein for finding you when they did."

She thought it over, and Standish, sensing that she did not want to talk, stood up. "When can I go home?" she asked.

"In twenty-four hours," he said, "if you're good."

She smiled at this, and it was, apparently, a good omen, for when he stopped in, the following afternoon, she was packing her things.

"I'll drive you home," he said.

She talked easily in the car, telling him how she had left home at sixteen because of her ambition to go on the stage. "I wound up clerking in a five-and-dime," she said, "and after that there were other jobs in other stores. I checked hats in night clubs and sold cigarettes." She laughed shortly. "That was as close as I ever got to the theater."

She was still talking when Standish stopped his car in front of the Belmont Arms, and what he did then surprised him almost as much as it did the girl. He suddenly heard himself asking her to dinner.

Arlene Walton eyed him curiously. Then she smiled. "All right," she said. "I'd like that."

Standish had to stop at his office, but it was a mistake to have asked his guest up. For the office was presided over by Mary Hayward, young, blonde, and, as his combination nurse, secretary and girl Friday,

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jealous of the doctor's time—and quite possibly of his affections. Mary's green eyes struck sparks when she saw Arlene. Presently he was driving through the outskirts of the city with Arlene.

Arlene expressed a preference for the Castle Inn. Once they were seated, Standish remembered Victor Keenan and knew why. Victor had a ten-piece band and it was pretty good. Victor looked good too, with his blond hair and dinner jacket and professionally winning smile. So did the slim young brunette who sang with him.

"Is that the girl?" Standish asked.

"That's her," said Arlene. "Helen Shirley. She's got money."

The name was familiar to Standish. While not exactly first family, John Shirley had made considerable money in the construction business.

"I was good enough for him when he had nothing but a saxophone," Arlene said, "but now it's different." Then the story came out.

Victor Keenan had come to town three years ago with an orchestra and had stayed on to work with one of the local radio stations. Until recently he had taken odd jobs and got along as best he could. But during the summer he had organized a band, made some good arrangements and the beginning of a reputation. This was his last week at the Castle Inn. He had a few radio dates left to fill, and after that he was taking the band on the road—with Helen Shirley as vocalist.

As Arlene's moodiness increased Standish offered certain platitudes by way of consolation. He said Keenan hardly seemed worth suicide. He said it was tough to take right now, but she'd get over it and probably find someone else a lot better, and anyway it worked both ways: you loved someone and it didn't do any good, and all the time some other guy you didn't want loved you.

"I guess you're right," she said finally. "I was in love with Vic, and Harry Gibney can't see anyone but me. He's a good enough guy, but he's just not for me. Only he can't see it. He says if he can't have me, nobody can."

She opened her handbag and the smell of gardenias was strong, reminding Standish of her apartment.

"What does Gibney do?"

"He's from somewhere out West. He runs a bowling alley with another fellow. It's just down the street from the beauty parlor where I work."

Standish said, "Maybe you ought to go away. You can get a job anywhere these days."

Arlene nodded and now the slackness was more apparent in her face. "Maybe I ought to," she said. "Maybe that's an idea. And I could get the money. I had an offer just the other day."

She paused, then continued, her voice thick with drink: "There's a man here in town—you'd know the name if I told you—who'd pay me

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to leave. He and I used to —well, we had an arrangement. He was separated from his wife then, but now they're back together again and he wants to be county judge and he's scared I'll talk. I never asked him for a dime after we split up and he came to see me the other day and—" She hesitated again. "Why not?" she said.

"Why not," agreed Standish, "if that's what he wants?"

"Also," said Arlene, "there's another citizen who might pay. If you went to prison for assaulting some girl out in Toledo and got paroled and then violated that parole—if the police could pick you up for that and you knew someone could turn you in, wouldn't *you* pay?"

Standish felt strangely shocked at what she was saying.

"That sounds like blackmail," he said.

Her eyes opened wide and there was innocence in them. "I thought blackmail was when you kept collecting over and over for something."

"There's more than one kind."

"But I wouldn't ask for much," she said. "And if I left town, what harm could it do?"

Standish said he guessed she should think it over before she did anything, and suddenly he'd had enough and wanted to get home.

But he was unable to dismiss the girl from his thoughts. In the morning, as his mind went back, he was singularly depressed by it all.

Mary Hayward gave him a stony glance and a distant good morning. She took a long time straightening his desk. Normally Mary's manner during office hours was one of strict formality; but occasionally she bullied and scolded him with the proprietary intensity of a woman in love. She did not approve of his work as medical examiner.

"It isn't bad enough to waste your time on Lieutenant Ballard and medical examiner cases," she said. "Now you have to take patients to dinner and hold their hands."

"I didn't hold her hand," Standish said glumly. "I only wanted to cheer her up. She's had a tough time and—"

"Oh, I know," Mary said with studied irony. "I'm sure everything will be just perfect now."

It was in the middle of the following week that he got the call from the Belmont Arms. He was shaving at the moment—seven thirty in the morning. This time the call was official. He was to go to the alley behind the apartments, where a row of garages stretched to the corner.

A sergeant from the precinct house was in charge. "The motor was running," he said, and indicated the six-year-old coupé. "The guy in the next garage heard it as he was going to work and saw the door was shut, so he took a look. When he saw her, he shut off the motor and called in."

The doors of the coupé stood open now, and Paul Standish, moving to

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the driver's side, saw the small crumpled figure of Arlene Walton behind the wheel. She wore a print dress and no stockings. Her head was slumped forward so that her chestnut hair hung down, obscuring her face, and when Standish parted the hair and saw the color of the skin he knew how she had died. He reached for the handbag that lay beside her on the seat. That was when he noticed the smell of whiskey inside the car.

"Found this next to the bag," the sergeant said, and handed the doctor a small sheet of paper, folded in the middle.

Standish handled it gingerly, scanning the one-paragraph suicide note. He turned it over, holding it close to his face, then he opened his bag, tore two sheets from a notebook and put the note between them.

He opened her purse and the familiar gardenia-like scent came to him, strong and distinctive. There was a hard line to his jaw as he closed the bag and stepped back.

"You'd better phone headquarters," he said to the sergeant. "You'd better get Lieutenant Ballard out here." He was moving round the car, noting the bits of tar in the tire treads, glancing at the doors, estimating the angle of turn from the alley.

"Ballard?" The sergeant's tone was questioning. "I thought Ballard was a homicide man."

"He is," Standish said. "That's why we need him. . . ."

It was late afternoon before Paul Standish was ready to make a report. When he walked into Ballard's office he found the lieutenant slumped in his chair with a look of acute displeasure on his face. Ballard greeted his visitor with a grunt.

"You still say it's murder?" he asked. "Did she die of carbon monoxide?"

"Yes," said Standish. "Also she was drunk."

"Okay. She sits in her car, drinking until she's ready to pass out, and then starts the motor."

"What did she drink out of?" Standish knew no bottle had been found.

"All right," Ballard said. "She got drunk somewhere else, tossed out the bottle, and—"

"No." Standish shook his head. "The p.m. showed she was pretty drunk, Tom. I doubt if she could drive. I'm sure she never could have made the turn into the garage without scraping a fender on the door. She got drunk somewhere outside all right. But someone else drove her home, left the motor running, planted the note, and closed the doors."

"That note looked awfully good," Ballard said. "It was in her handwriting."

Standish moved to a nearby table and examined Arlene's bag and the contents which had been spread out beside it. Selecting the billfold, he sniffed it, and the odor of gardenias was there, faint but unmistakable.

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"She wrote the note before she left her house, because she didn't carry a pen. Did you find out when she left?"

"Around nine," Ballard said. "I talked to that guy Gibney you told me about. He sat up until one o'clock waiting for her."

"She wore a print dress," Standish said. "With no pockets. So where did she carry the note? If it had been in the bag it would smell of perfume, like these other things. I smelled it this morning. There was no perfume on that note, and I say she didn't have it. I think she wrote that note when she took those sleeping tablets and someone picked it up and saved it."

Interest quickened in Ballard's gaze. He wanted to know who had found Arlene Walton the night she tried suicide. When he had all the details, he said, "Then, if you throw out the kid on the switchboard, Gibney's the only guy who could have got the note."

"Unless Cormack came earlier and found her and walked out."

"How would he get in?"

Standish told of his conversation with Arlene. He said he believed that Cormack was the politician she had referred to as being willing to pay her to leave town. He might still have a key to her apartment. Then, remembering what she had said about the possibility of collecting from some parole violator from Toledo, he passed that information along to Ballard.

The lieutenant made some notes. "It's a lead," he said. "I can probably check that and then narrow it down and get prints forwarded." He leaned back as Standish stood up. "Anything else?"

Standish thought it over. He said he had noticed tar in the tire treads.

"Maybe you'd want to find out what roads have been freshly tarred. Maybe out by the river. There are some parking places up that way. There's a chance the girl's car parked there. If so, maybe that's where the drinking was done."

"And maybe they killed the bottle and tossed it out the window," Ballard said, keeping pace with the doctor's suggestions. "If we're lucky we might find the bottle with the dame's prints on it and maybe someone else's. Is that it?"

Standish shrugged. "It was just a thought," he said.

"All right." Ballard hesitated and his voice was mildly ironic when he continued. "What's that pat line of yours about your job being only to find the cause of death and if anyone is culpable? Well, I guess you have, all right. You've made it murder, and now I guess you dump it in my lap and walk out on me, hunh?"

Standish was familiar with the approach. He had been needled by Ballard before. He heard himself say, "If I can help any, I will."

He did not know why he drove from headquarters to the Belmont Arms either, but he did, and presently he was in the garage and

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climbing behind the wheel of Arlene Walton's coupé. He lit a cigarette and slid far down in the seat.

He was not looking for clues, for that was Ballard's job, but his mind was busy, remembering the dead girl and the things she had said—feeling somehow a personal interest beyond the routine of the job. He wanted Ballard to find the whiskey bottle that had been thrown away; Ballard had the manpower at his disposal. But would this be enough?

He sat up slowly, his eyes on the rear-view mirror, watching the window panel at the back move into his line of vision. The idea came to him then, and he leaned quickly forward, a new alertness growing in him as his tension mounted.

With handkerchief in hand he reached for the mirror, tipping it one way and then another. That was how he happened to see the mark there—a distinctive mark imprinted on the glass by someone's thumb or finger. That there would be other prints upon the metal back, Standish was certain. What he did not know was whether they, or this one, would be a man's or a woman's . . .

The city maintained an office for the medical examiner at the morgue. Adjoining this office was a conference room, and it was here that Paul Standish conducted his inquiry the following evening after Lieutenant Ballard had notified him that he was ready.

Ballard was waiting with a stenographer and a fingerprint expert when Standish arrived, and grouped around the long table were the three men he had summoned: Harry Gibney, Victor Keenan, and Edward Cormack. Standish nodded to them and sat down as Ballard began his preliminary remarks by stating that Arlene Walton had been murdered and explaining the circumstances of her death. He removed some papers from a bulging brief case as he spoke, and now, spreading them out before him, he turned to Edward Cormack.

"At two forty on the afternoon of the fifth," he said, "you drew five thousand in cash from your Second National account. Did you give it to Arlene Walton or not?"

Cormack's face was impassive.

"Who says I intended to give it to her?"

"She did." Ballard glanced at Standish as he expertly stretched the truth. "She told the doctor you'd offered her cash to leave town, and she told him why. Do you want me to go into that here, or would you rather answer my question?"

"I gave her the money that afternoon," Cormack said quietly.

"She didn't have it in her purse when we found her," Ballard said, "and we couldn't locate it in her apartment. Maybe we can find out what happened to it," he said, and turned to Victor Keenan, checking his notes again as he began to review the big man's association with the dead woman.

Keenan denied nothing. He sat

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straight-backed in his chair, not bothering with the charm and personality he offered to customers, but deadly serious as he admitted that he had broken off his affair with Arlene Walton because he wanted to marry someone else.

Ballard seemed satisfied. He selected the suicide note from among his papers and explained Standish's theory that it had been written before.

"You arrived at her apartment five minutes after Gibney found her that first night," he said to Keenan. "Did you see this note—or any note? . . . Okay," he said when the other shook his head. "I guess that leaves you," he went on, turning to Gibney.

Gibney stared morosely back at him, his rocky jaw set and a look of tension in his squat powerful body. "I didn't see any note," he said, "and I didn't kill her."

"Maybe the switchboard operator swiped the note," Ballard said sarcastically. "Maybe we don't care, now that we know it's murder. The guy that took the note killed her and framed the second suicide and here's how he did it."

He took his time telling how Arlene Walton had left her apartment sometime before nine—in her car—and had picked up a man downtown and driven out along the river. "We got a little break on that," he said and told about the tar in the tire treads. "Only one road had been tarred this week, and when we found out where it went, we knew there were just three good parking places where a guy and a girl might park to do a little drinking."

He took a pint bottle from his brief case, and the rear-view mirror Standish had seen before. "We picked up twenty-one empties," he continued, "and all but three had women's fingerprints on them. One of them—this one—had Arlene Walton's prints on it. It also had a man's prints on it, and those prints checked with a fellow who did time for assault in Toledo and violated his parole. He had another name then, but it doesn't matter. He's the same guy and his prints are also on this rear-view mirror, and so if you gentlemen will just let my fingerprint man have a look at you—"

Standish cut in. He hadn't known about the prints checking. Now he said:

"I don't think you need to bother with the prints now. If the ones on the mirror check with the others, you've got enough." He paused to glance about, aware that Ballard did not understand what he meant. "Arlene Walton was five feet one. The man who drove her home when she had passed out had to be careful. He didn't want an accident and the mirror was no good to him until he changed—"

The sentence ended abruptly as a chair scraped. Standish jumped up, with Ballard ahead of him. The lieutenant could move fast, but this time Harry Gibney was faster. He

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charged down the table and around, a step ahead of Ballard, a wild light in his eye. The lieutenant yelled, but it did no good. Gibney drove in, shoulders hunched and a snarl in his throat.

He slammed both fists savagely, and Vic Keenan went back against the wall. He tried to slide along it, but Gibney caught him, clubbing him down with rights and lefts and jumping on his chest.

Ballard caught him there, Ballard and the fingerprint man and the stenographer. They hauled him off, and it took the three of them to hold him.

"Cut it out!" Ballard stormed as Gibney fought. "If you kill him now, you'll get the chair. Take it easy! The state'll take care of it."

The words got through to Gibney and he dropped his arms. Ballard looked down at the bruised and unconscious Victor Keenan. He glanced up at Standish. "What was that about the mirror?"

"Arlene Walton was short," Standish said. "So are Cormack and Gibney." He explained how he had sat behind the wheel of the coupé and noticed the angle of view. "The mirror was adjusted for a tall man—taller than I am. I figured if there were prints on it, they should be Keenan's."

Ballard grunted. "You caught on quick," he said to Gibney. "But you missed the note that first night."

"I wasn't looking for it," Gibney said.

"Keenan picked it up," Standish said. "He could see what had happened; he was afraid his name would be in the note, and he probably stuck it in his pocket."

"He wanted her to die," Gibney said. "But you saved her, and he kept the note—"

"—and decided to use it," Ballard said, "when she asked him for money. He knew if she ever talked he would go back to prison instead of marrying the Shirley dame and her money. So he faked the suicide. He probably grabbed the five thousand bucks you gave her, Cormack."

As he reached for the telephone his glance fastened on Standish.

"I still don't know how you spotted it as a phony," he said. "I talked with the sergeant from the precinct house. He said you acted suspicious from the minute you stepped into that garage. Even before you had a chance to read the note you acted like something was wrong. Don't tell me it was just a hunch."

"You might call it that," Standish said. "You see, I never happened to run into a case where a woman had committed suicide that way. I wondered about it and looked up some statistics put out by New York City officials. Out of twelve hundred and ninety-five suicides in one year, there were twenty-five or twenty-six deaths from motor exhausts—*all of them men!*"

"Oh," said Ballard.

"Yes," said Standish. "I don't say there aren't exceptions, but any time

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you find a woman dead under such circumstances you've got a right to be suspicious."

"I'll remember that," Ballard said, and then, his hand still on the telephone, a slow smile came about his eyes. Like Standish, he had taken a certain amount of criticism and adverse comment from Mary Hayward when he made demands on the doctor's time. This must have occurred to him now, because he said, "You ought to tell your nurse about this next time she needles you about wasting your time."

The suggestion fell on fertile soil. It seemed suddenly important to Standish that he see Mary Hayward.

"I'll tell her tonight," he said.

Lieutenant Ballard understood. He was still grinning as he lifted the telephone and dialed the operator.

COMING ATTRACTIONS . . .

Next Month	First Prize Winner (see page 47)
May issue	a new STUART PALMER story Hildegarde Withers on the Groucho Marx Show
June issue	a new CHARLOTTE ARMSTRONG story
July issue	a new ELLERY QUEEN story
August issue	a new HUGH PENTECOST story
September issue	a new STANLEY ELLIN story
October issue	a new RUFUS KING story

Also watch for new stories by JOHN COLLIER, ANDREW GARVE, ROBERT BLOCH, DOROTHY SALISBURY DAVIS, CLIFFORD KNIGHT *and* MICHAEL GILBERT

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We are happy to welcome Alberto Moravia to the pages of EQMM. Mr. Moravia has been called "Italy's leading writer" by no less a literary critic than Charles Rolo of "The Atlantic" magazine; and James Kelly, writing in "The Saturday Review," reminds us that Mr. Moravia "has been hailed as one of the consummate craftsmen of our day."

Two of Alberto Moravia's most famous novels are THE WOMAN OF ROME, *the story of a prostitute, and* CONJUGAL LOVE, *the study of a marriage. Love in all its phases is Mr. Moravia's special literary concern, and as James Kelly also pointed out, "critics have coupled the name Moravia with D. H. Lawrence and Stendhal in the field of sensual perception."*

Born in Rome in 1907, Mr. Moravia had little formal education beyond grammar school. His first novel, published when he was only twenty-two, made Mr. Moravia famous overnight, and by his late twenties he was an established and successful writer. He has traveled extensively and has lived in Paris, London, Mexico, New York, Peking, and Athens.

"The Perfect Crime" is a curious tale of passion and hate, and of a plan for revenge. It bears the stamp of Alberto Moravia's special talent — indeed, only an Italian writer, influenced by French realism, could have conceived and written it . . .

THE PERFECT CRIME

by ALBERTO MORAVIA

(translated by Angus Davidson)

THE THING WAS STRONGER THAN I was: every time I got to know a girl, I introduced her to Rigamonti, and he, as regularly, lured her away from me. Possibly I did it to show him that I had just as much success with women as he had; or possibly it was because I could never bring myself to think ill of him, and each time, in spite of his former treachery, I fell back again into the habit of looking on him as a friend.

I could have borne it more easily if he had done things with a little delicacy, a little good breeding; but he behaved with utter insolence, just as though the matter didn't concern me at all. He reached the point of courting the girl in my presence and of making dates with her under my very nose.

In cases like this, as is well known, it is the person with the better manners who usually gives

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way: while Rigamonti had no scruples about doing whatever was most convenient for himself, I would stand quietly aside for fear of provoking a quarrel and thus showing a lack of respect towards the young lady. Once or twice I protested, but in a timid sort of way, because I am not good at expressing my feelings, and when I am boiling with rage inside I remain outwardly cold, so that no one would even think I was angry. Do you know what he always answered? "Blame yourself, not me. If the girl preferred me, it means that I know how to manage things better than you do."

This, of course, was true: just as it was true that physically he was superior to me. But it is precisely because a man leaves your girl friends alone that you can recognize a true friend.

To cut a long story short, after he had played this trick on me four or five times, I began to hate him so passionately that, at the bar where we both worked, I used to take care to stand sideways or with my back to him, so as not to see him—even when I was behind the counter with him and we were both serving the same customers. By this time I had almost given up thinking about the wrongs he had done me; I thought merely of *him,* and what he was like, and I realized that I couldn't bear him any longer.

I hated his sturdy, stupid face, with its low forehead and small eyes, its big nose, its full lips and slight mustache. I hated his hair that was like a helmet on his head, black and shining, with two long locks that started at his temples and went right over to the back of his neck. I hated his hairy arms, which he showed off as he stood working the coffee urn.

His nose, above all, fascinated me. It was broad at the nostrils, curved, thick, pale in the middle of his ruddy face, so that it looked as if the force of the bone had stretched the skin. Often I thought of giving him a punch right on that nose of his and hearing the bone crack under my fist. But this was a dream, for I am small and slim, and Rigamonti could have knocked me down with one finger.

I don't know how it was that I first came to think of killing him—it may have dated from the evening when we went to see an American film called *The Perfect Crime.* To be exact, I did not at first really want to kill him—I merely wanted to imagine how I would behave in order to do so. It gave me pleasure to think about it at night before I went to sleep and in the morning before getting up, and—oh, yes, in the daytime too, when there was nothing to do in the bar and Rigamonti was sitting on a stool behind the counter, reading the paper, his well-greased head bent over the page.

I used to think: "Now I'll take the hammer we use for breaking ice and hit him over the head with it."

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But, of course, I was only joking. It was like being in love and thinking all day about the woman and imagining the things that you would like to do and say to her. Only, in my case, Rigamonti took the place of a sweetheart, and the pleasure that others get in fancying kisses and caresses, I found in dreaming about his death.

Still as a joke, and because I took so much pleasure in it, I worked out an imaginary plan in every detail. But then, having formulated this plan, I was assailed by the temptation to put it into practice; and this temptation was so strong that I finally stopped trying to resist it and made up my mind to take action.

I began, therefore, to tell him, between one cup of coffee and the next, that I had got to know a very lovely girl, and that this time it wasn't just one of the usual girls whom *I* liked and whom *he* then pinched from me, but a girl who had had a good look at him and who wanted him and no one else. I repeated this to him day after day for a week, adding new details each time of her ardent love for him and pretending to be deeply jealous.

At first, he tried to appear indifferent, and said, "If she loves me, she can come to the bar. I'll stand her a cup of coffee."

But soon he began to lose his nerve. Every now and then, with a pretense that he was joking, he would ask, "Now tell me—this girl—does she love me still?"

"Of course she does," I would reply.

"And what does she say?"

"She says she finds you very attractive."

"But in what way? What does she find attractive about me?"

"Everything," I would say, "your nose, your hair, your eyes, your mouth, the way you work the coffee machine—everything, I tell you . . ."

The very things, in fact, that I hated him for . . .

He would smile and fill with pride; for he was absurdly conceited and thought the world of himself. You could see that his silly brain was concerned with this mad infatuation of the girl I had invented and with nothing else, and that he wanted desperately to meet the girl, but only pride prevented him from asking me.

At last, one day, he said angrily, "Now look here, either you introduce me to her or stop talking about her."

I had been waiting for these words, and I immediately fixed an appointment with him for the next evening.

My plan was a simple one. We closed at ten o'clock, but the proprietor always remained in the bar, doing the accounts, until half-past ten. I would take Rigamonti to a spot below the embankment of the Viterbo railway close by, telling him that the girl would be waiting for us there. At a quarter past ten the train went past, and I, taking advantage

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of the noise, would shoot Rigamonti with a Beretta which I had bought some time before in the Piazza Vittorio. At twenty minutes past ten I would return to the bar to fetch a parcel I had forgotten, and so the proprietor would see me. At half-past ten—at the latest—I would be in bed in the porter's room at the block of flats where the porter rented me a camp bed for the night.

This plan I had copied, in part, from the American movie, particularly with regard to the synchronization of the crime with the passing of the train. It was quite possible I might be discovered, but I would still have the satisfaction of having given vent to my hatred. And for this satisfaction I was prepared even to do hard labor.

The next day we were kept very busy because it was Saturday, and this was a good thing—it meant Rigamonti had no chance to speak to me about the girl and I had no time to think about my plan. At ten o'clock, as usual, we took off our linen jackets and, having said good night to the proprietor, went out under the half-lowered roller-blind. The bar was in the avenue that leads to the Acqua Acetosa, a few steps from the Viterbo railway. At that hour the last couples had left the Garden of Remembrance on the hillock nearby, and there was no one in the dark avenue under the trees. It was April; the air was already soft and the sky was gradually clearing.

We walked along the avenue, Rigamonti in the highest of spirits, patting me on the back in his usual condescending way, and I myself rigid, my hand on my chest, pressing against the pistol in the inside pocket of my wind-jacket. We left the avenue at the fork and turned into the grassy path that ran under the railway embankment. There, owing to the embankment, it was darker than elsewhere, and I had taken this into calculation too.

Rigamonti walked in front and I behind. When we reached the appointed place, not far from a street lamp, I said, "She said to wait for her here. You'll see, she'll come along in a minute."

Rigamonti stopped, lit a cigarette, and answered, "As a barman you're pretty good, but as a hustler you're incomparable."

He used a different word, of course—a gutter word—in fact, he was even more offensive than usual.

It was assuredly a lonely spot. The moon, as it rose behind us, lit up the whole of the flat ground beneath us, which was thinly veiled in white mist, with dark patches of scrub and mounds of silt here and there, and with the Tiber winding through it, loop after loop, looking like silver. I seemed to feel myself shivering because of the damp mist and I said to Rigamonti, more for my own benefit than his, "Of course she can't be punctual to the minute—she works and has to wait till her employers go out."

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But he answered promptly, "No, no, there she is."

I turned and saw the dark figure of a woman coming down the path.

I was told afterward that the place was frequented by women of that type, but I did not know it at the time. For a moment I thought that the girl I had invented really existed. Meanwhile, Rigamonti was walking toward her, full of confidence, and automatically I followed him.

When she was only a few paces off, she came out of the darkness into the light of the lamp, and then I saw her. And she almost frightened me. She must have been at least sixty, and had strange, mad-looking eyes painted with great black circles; her face was heavily powdered, her mouth crimson, her hair fluttered in the breeze, and a black ribbon hung around her neck. She was the kind who seeks the darkest places—so as not to be seen; and it is certainly hard to understand how such women, old and decrepit as they are, still manage to find customers.

Rigamonti—before actually seeing her—had already asked, in his usual shameless way, "Signorina, were you expecting us?"—and she, equally shameless, had replied, "Yes, of course."

Then, finally, Rigamonti saw her clearly and understood his mistake. He moved a step back and said, hesitatingly, "Er, well, I'm sorry, I'm afraid this evening I can't . . . but here is my friend."

He took a sideways leap and quickly disappeared down the embankment. I realized that Rigamonti had thought I intended to avenge myself by presenting him with a monster of this kind, after all those other pretty girls; and I also realized that my perfect crime had evaporated.

I stood looking at the woman, who said to me, poor creature, with a smile like the grimace on a carnival mask, "Well, my pretty blondie, will you give me a cigarette?"

I suddenly felt sorry for her—and for myself too, and even—yes, even for Rigamonti. I had felt such intense hatred against him, and now, somehow or other, my hatred had been swept away; and tears came into my eyes as I reflected that, thanks to this woman, I had been saved from becoming a murderer.

"I haven't a cigarette," I said to her, "but here, take this. You can always sell it for a thousand lire or so"—and I put the Beretta into her hand.

Then I, too, jumped down off the slope of the embankment and ran off toward the avenue. At that moment the Viterbo train went past, carriage after carriage with all the windows lit up, scattering red sparks into the night. I stopped and looked at it as it faded in the distance; and finally I went home.

The next day, at the bar, Rigamonti said to me, "Of course I knew there was a catch in it somewhere! But never mind, it was a good joke."

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I looked at him and became aware that I no longer hated him, although he was still the same as before, with the same forehead, the same eyes, the same nose, the same hair, and the same hairy arms that he still showed off the same way. All of a sudden I felt lighter, as though the April wind, which puffed out the curtain at the door of the bar, had blown right inside me. Rigamonti handed me two cups of coffee to take to two customers who had sat down in the sun at a table outside, and as I took them I said to him in a low voice, "Shall we meet this evening? I've invited Amelia to come along."

He knocked out the coffee grounds under the counter, refilled the measures with fresh coffee, released some steam from the machine, and then answered simply, without any bitterness, "I'm sorry, but this evening I can't."

I went out with the cups, and I realized I was disappointed that he was not going to steal Amelia from me, as he had stolen all the other girls . . .

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- BESTSELLER MYSTERY NO. 203—*"The Long Body," by Helen McCloy. "High-keyed," says The Saturday Review of this story of a woman who attempts murder to protect her son, but finds that worse than death is the fear and doubt that threaten her sanity.* on sale, February 14th

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **MIGNON G. EBERHART**

TITLE: ***Murder on St. Valentine's Day***

TYPE: Detective Story

DETECTIVE: James Wickwire, banker

LOCALE: New York City

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *The fantastic Valentine was an absurd check, but it was perfectly legal and had to be cashed — for $20,000. But what happened after that was not legal at all . . .*

I LOOKED AT THE LACY OBJECT ON my desk. "*What* is *this?*"

The young assistant cashier replied, "It's a handkerchief. Possibly intended for the Valentine trade," he hazarded thoughtfully. "It's shaped like a heart."

"I can see that!"

The handkerchief was undoubtedly heart-shaped and outlined with lace. Written on it in bright red were words and numerals. I touched the writing cautiously.

The assistant cashier said, "It's not blood. It's lipstick."

"I'm not so old I don't know lipstick when I see it," I said stiffly.

"Yes, sir," he said hurriedly. "I mean, no, sir. Shall I tell them to cash it?"

I debated, seething with exasperation. For the thing was, incredibly, a check—and a check for $20,000. It was made out to one Ronald Murch and it was signed by Clarissa Hartridge, and Clarissa was one of my widows.

I hasten to say that I am, and, *Deo volente,* intend to remain, a bachelor. My name is James Wickwire. I am a senior vice president at the bank within whose sedate walls I have spent most of my life.

Clarissa was one of my widows

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only in the sense that her estate, along with that of sundry other widows, was in my care.

One way and another, my widows have caused me considerable mental anguish, due in the main to their recurrent impulses to invest money in nonexistent oil wells, or to finance expeditions for the discovery of buried pirate treasure.

Up to that day, however, Clarissa had given me very little anxiety. She had kept well within her income, never made mistakes in subtraction, and was an extremely charming and pretty woman.

Consequently I had felt deeply grateful to her, and enjoyed dining with her, and a Miss Gray who shared her house, once or twice a year in the comfortable certainty that Clarissa would not ask me to balance her checkbook.

But this fantastic check was not merely an illusion shattered for me. It represented a large share of Clarissa's capital. The walls of the bank did not in fact rock, but I myself was shaken to the core. It was all too clear that something had happened to Clarissa and it was quite as clear what that something was. For my widows do not invariably remain widows. Sometimes they follow the same remarkable quality of impulse in choosing second husbands that they do in choosing investments.

"You say this Ronald Murch is out there now?" I asked the assistant cashier.

"Yes, sir. Young. Dark. Handsome. Presented the check as cool as you please. They brought it to me and I thought you'd better see it."

"Of course." I tapped the lacy edge of the handkerchief. Young, dark, and handsome! Clarissa was fifty if she was a day, and if I'd had my fingers on her plump little neck just then I really think I'd have twisted it. Instead I told my secretary to get Mrs. Hartridge on the telephone and then, perceiving the inquisitive gleam in the assistant cashier's pale blue eyes, I told him he could go and I'd see to it. He looked frustrated but went away.

Clarissa came on the phone and began at once to speak. "James, I know why you're calling me," she said airily. "It's all right about the check. Cash it."

I daresay I uttered a rather strangled sound. She said coolly, "Have you got a cold, James?"

"No! What is the meaning . . ."

"I'm buying a formula for face cream."

"*Face*—Clarissa, this is capital!"

She laughed lightly. "Of course. I sold those Turnpike bonds."

A choking sensation gripped me. She said, "Oh, by the way, James. Can you return that check to me yourself? After you've cashed it, I mean. I don't want it to go through all that routine in the bank."

"I can understand that!" I said acidly, but she had hung up.

When I had got control of myself I sent for Mr. Ronald Murch, who

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was still waiting. He was, indeed, dark, young, and handsome with a charm which raked my already lacerated nerves. And to my intense surprise a young lady with a great many golden curls and a sallow but heavily made-up face was hanging fondly on his arm. He introduced her.

"This is Miss April Moon."

The young lady gave me a coquettish smile. "Soon to be Mrs. Ronald Murch," she said, and hugged his arm. "We just got the license."

I was rather taken aback, since I had believed Clarissa destined for this dubious honor. Ronald Murch nodded at the heart-shaped handkerchief with its red writing. "That does look rather silly, doesn't it?" he said.

"May I ask why it is written in this remarkable way?"

For an instant something puzzled flashed in his dark eyes. "It was a whim of Clarissa's—I mean Mrs. Hartridge's. Just an impulse. She said it was suitable—lipstick, cosmetics. You see?"

"I can't say that I do," I replied shortly.

Miss April Moon giggled. "What does it matter how the old girl wanted to write it! It's legal. He gets the cash. She gets her formula. We get married."

He drew a folded paper from an inner pocket and waved it at me. "This is my new formula for face cream."

I reached automatically for the paper but he returned it quickly to his pocket. "Sorry," he said, "but it's a secret. I developed it myself. Believe me, it's an oil well."

The words struck a sensitive nerve within me. I said icily, "Does Mrs. Hartridge know of your approaching marriage?"

Miss Moon giggled. Mr. Murch assumed a businesslike air. "That has nothing to do with you, Mr. Wickwire. If you have any doubt about this check kindly phone Mrs. Hartridge."

So I was obliged to give directions to the effect that the absurd check was to be cashed. I also saw to it that the handkerchief itself was given to me. I placed it in my desk, and there was nothing further that I could do. Clarissa's instructions had been definite. I had already exceeded such small authority as I had. And Clarissa was in love. I know little of women, but I know when I'm licked.

Scarcely an hour later Clarissa telephoned me. "James," she said, "he's dead! Ronald Murch. He's been shot. Right in my library. The police are here. They say he's been murdered. Please come!"

Clarissa's neat if unpretentious little house in the East Nineties was surrounded by policemen. Once inside the living room, a police lieutenant fell upon me, questioned me exhaustively, then told me the circumstances of the murder.

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"He's in there," he said, nodding toward the tiny library which adjoined the living room. The door was open; a cluster of men, some in uniform and some in plain-clothes, moved apart a little and I could see feet in highly polished black oxfords, at an odd angle on the rug. I could not see the rest of the body.

"Shot twice," the lieutenant said. "One got him through the heart. Mrs. Hartridge claims she heard the shots and thought it was a backfire from the street. After a time she came downstairs. Saw the guy in there, on the rug. Dead as a duck. Says she phoned to the police right away. She was alone in the house."

There were no servants in the household, but there was Miss Gray. I said, "There's a Miss Gray who lived with Mrs. Hartridge—"

The lieutenant interrupted. "She's gone shopping. She hasn't come back yet."

"Did you find the murder gun?" I asked.

He nodded solemnly. "That's the clincher. The gun belonged to Mrs. Hartridge. She says it was her husband's. Kept in a drawer of the table in the hall. Says she hasn't touched it, knows nothing of it. There were no fingerprints. Probably she wore gloves."

"Do you mean to say you suspect Mrs. Hartridge?"

"Who else?" he said, and rose as if to end the interview.

"Wait," I said hurriedly. "She had no motive, no reason—"

He gave me a cold and skeptical look. "Listen. The guy had twenty thousand dollars in his pocket. Mrs. Hartridge admits that she gave him a check for the cash this morning. He had a key to this house in his pocket—a key to *this* house. She's an elderly widow with money. *And* he had another girl!" He eyed me triumphantly. "There was a marriage license in his pocket. What does it look like to you?"

It looked extremely serious, and I swallowed hard. "What about the girl?"

"*She* didn't kill him. We traced her right away. She's at a beauty shop getting her hair curled and she's been there for an hour. I've sent a squad car for her."

I could not comprehend Miss Moon's unbridled desire for still more curls, but I did comprehend the solid nature of her alibi. I said, "Didn't Mrs. Hartridge tell you that she gave him the twenty thousand dollars for the purchase of a face cream formula?"

He laughed shortly. "Oh, sure. She also admitted that she'd picked him up on the street! Didn't know anything about his background! Claims she didn't know he was going to be married! Probably that's not the first money she's given him. By the way —you say you're her banker—we'll have to take a look through her canceled checks."

And I'd be obliged to give them a check written in lipstick on a heart-shaped handkerchief. It seemed wis-

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er to tell him of it at once, give him Murch's own explanation for it, and —if possible—thus minimize its disastrous effect. So, very carefully, I related the whole incident.

But the lieutenant was again triumphant. He smacked Clarissa's little Pembroke table with a fist which nearly broke it. "That proves it! She was in love with the guy. You're a banker. Did you ever get a check written like that before?"

I was obliged to confess I hadn't. "It was an impulse," I told him again. "Lipstick—cosmetic business —there's a connection. He said he had the face cream formula. It was in his pocket."

He shook his head. "He was lying to you. So was she because she knew you'd question that check. She wouldn't have wanted you to know her real reason for giving him that money. There's no formula. I went through his pockets myself." He looked at the door as another policeman entered. "What is it, Jake?"

It was Clarissa's friend and housemate, Miss Gray, returned from her shopping trip and horrified. They ushered her into the room and let me remain while they questioned her.

Naturally I listened with some interest. I knew Miss Gray, of course. She was a pleasant, rather plain young woman, although she looked handsomer than usual that morning for the light from the window fell directly upon her, revealing a dazzling complexion which seemed to make her dark eyes glow. She wore a neat gray suit and hat and clutched a black handbag.

She knew Mr. Murch, of course, she told the lieutenant; he had been a frequent guest of Clarissa's. She had gone shopping that morning. When asked if she had talked to anyone who could identify her, she grasped the intent of the question at once, with a flash of her dark eyes. But she said that she doubted it very much. She had made only one purchase, stockings, and that was not a charge; she had paid cash. The box of stockings was on the table in the hall. Most of the morning she had simply strolled, window shopping.

The lieutenant pounced: "Mrs. Hartridge was very fond of Ronald Murch, wasn't she? In fact, there was quite a romance going on there. Tell us the truth, Miss Gray."

She rose angrily, her eyes blazing. "That is outrageous! How dare you suggest such a thing!"

"Suppose I say that we have proof of it. Suppose I say that Mrs. Hartridge quarreled with him over a girl and shot him?"

"Then I'd say you don't know what you're talking about! There was nothing like that between them —nothing! I'll swear to it in court if it comes to that."

I interposed. "A formula for face cream seems to have disappeared, Miss Gray. Do you mind if the lieutenant—er—searches your handbag?"

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She lifted her eyebrows but gave her handbag to the lieutenant, who searched it rapidly, returned it to her, and said to me, "I tell you there's no such formula, Mr. Wickwire. See here, you go and talk to Mrs. Hartridge. Get her to confess. It'll save trouble all the way around. Jake—" The policeman stepped forward. "Take him to her."

I followed Jake's broad blue back up the little stairway to Clarissa's room. Another policeman, at a word from Jake, permitted me to enter it, and Clarissa came quickly to me. "James! I believe they think I shot him!"

She was very pretty, with blue eyes, brown hair, and an astonishing complexion—so lovely, indeed, and so much more youthful than I remembered it, that my anxiety was sharpened.

It has always been said that love beautifies a woman, and certainly she looked glowing and younger than her years. On the other hand she certainly showed no signs of grief, or, indeed, of any sort of emotion. But, of course, murderers are said to be remarkably callous and cold-blooded.

I said gloomily, "You'd better tell me all about it."

She did. Her story differed in no detail from the one she had told the police. When I asked her how young Much had got a key to the front door, her blue eyes widened. "I don't know! I didn't give him a key."

I didn't, I couldn't believe her. "Clarissa, when and where did you meet this young man?"

This, too, squared with the lieutenant's account. She said, with deplorable candor, it was in a taxi. "That is, I was waiting for a taxi, and so was he. It was raining. A taxi came along and he offered it to me and, of course, I had to ask him to share it. We were going the same way. By the way, James, the formula for the face cream is mine. I paid for it, remember, and he had come to deliver it to me. So be sure you claim it for me."

"Clarissa, are you telling the truth about this formula?"

"Certainly!" Her eyes snapped and she swished past me into a dressing room and back again. She had a white jar with a black top, unlabeled, in her hand. She held it under my nose. "This is the cream!"

I thrust it away with some force. After a moment I said, "Clarissa, *why* did you write that check in lipstick?"

She sniffed the cream, absently. "I'd never have thought of it myself. But then I realized it was an excellent idea."

I caught her by the shoulders. "*Who* thought of it? *Who* suggested it? Young Murch?"

She told me.

I went downstairs at once, and as I got to the foot of the stairs the door opened and April Moon, sobbing wildly between two policemen, surged into the hall. The lieutenant

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and Miss Gray emerged from the library. And there was only one course for me to take.

A flat parcel, wrapped and tied, lay on the hall table. I snatched it up. Miss Gray hurled herself upon me like a tiger defending its young. Miss Moon screamed. I thrust the flat parcel at the lieutenant and dived behind him, evading Miss Gray's fingers. Miss Gray whirled around and made for the door where the two policemen seized her.

The formula for the face cream was neatly tucked into the folds of a pair of stockings.

I explained it, although, of course, it was perfectly clear. "It's an excellent face cream. They've both been using it. Mrs. Hartridge and—" I nodded at Miss Gray whose flawless complexion was now a blazing white, as her eyes were blazing black. "Both of them wanted it. Miss April Moon only wanted the money."

"I've never used it!" Miss Moon cried. "It's no good. Ronald told me so. He said it was only a mixture of junk! He said it was a trick to get money from—" She clapped both hands over her mouth.

I said to the lieutenant, "The formula is, in fact, excellent. Obviously Murch didn't know that—he hit on it by chance. He meant merely to use the formula as an excuse to get money from Mrs. Hartridge. But both Miss Gray and Mrs. Hartridge have developed beautiful complexions by using the cream.

"Mrs. Hartridge made a deal with Murch for its purchase. He was to deliver the formula to her this morning. Miss Gray knew that it was her last chance to get the formula for herself. So she determined upon a subtle but rather neat plan."

"Huh?" The lieutenant was perplexed.

"It occurred to her to suggest a romance between Mrs. Hartridge and young Murch. It was a perfect set-up. Elderly widow with money; charming and poor young man. When Mrs. Hartridge was actually about to write a check to Murch for the formula, Miss Gray suggested that she write it in lipstick, on a heart-shaped handkerchief, as a good omen to the cosmetic business. Mrs. Hartridge—er—did so.

"Miss Gray knew the police would eventually see the check, which was sufficiently out-of-the-ordinary to attract attention. She denied the romance, indignantly, knowing that her defense of Mrs. Hartridge would incline you to exonerate Miss Gray—for if she had shot him, she reasoned, you would expect her to leap at the suggestion of Mrs. Hartridge's guilt."

"But—" the lieutenant said, "how did she find out—"

I replied, "I suggest that Miss Gray knew Murch was to come to the house. I suggest that she returned quietly, waited for him, let him in, took him to the library—and coldbloodedly shot him.

"Then she had to hurry. She put

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her own house key in his pocket—to add to the theory of a romance—snatched the formula and, probably, escaped by the kitchen door. She hid the formula in the parcel with the stockings merely, I think, because it struck her as a hiding place which was likely to be overlooked.

"So when that occurred to me, I snatched the stockings, because—well, you see if there had been nothing of importance in the parcel she would have done nothing. Instead of that—"

Something tingled on my cheek; I dabbed at it with my handkerchief which came away with streaks of red on it from the scratches left by Miss Gray's fingernails.

Not long ago I dined with Clarissa in her new and magnificent penthouse. As possibly everyone knows, she has made an enormous amount of money from her astute marketing of a face cream called, simply but suitably, Clarissa's Cream. Perhaps much of the success she has had in its merchandising is due to its trademark—which is a gay, red and white photograph of a heart-shaped handkerchief. It proved to be one of those extraordinary flukes of genius in advertising.

"So that," I said, "is why you wanted the check in good condition."

She smiled at me. "James," she said, "I have so much money. You must tell me all about investments."

I looked at her elegant gown, her matchless pearls, the sapphires and diamonds on her hands. "No, my dear," I said. "You tell me."

NEXT MONTH . . .

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(See page 130 for names of some of the authors)

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **AVRAM DAVIDSON**

TITLE: ***The Holy Man***

TYPE: Foreign Intrigue

AGENT: Wel'ed

LOCALE: North Africa

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *The Man of Many Names was trained to set the world — his world — on fire. It would make a brave show — for those who could read the signs . . . A tale of remarkable authenticity.*

THERE HAD BEEN A TIME WHEN he had been called Wel'ed, which is really not a name at all, any more than "Buddy" or "Kid"; but it was all the name he had. Not that he needed a name in those days, when he did not even need clothes. There were swarms of little boys just like him, naked and carefree, playing in the rabbit-warren streets of his native town, begging or stealing as the mood struck them or the opportunity occurred. Then he had been caught once, and the police had put him in the missionary school, where he had been given both clothes—a cotton shirt and shorts—and a name—Joseph. It had been difficult at first, getting used to them: to remember that the clothes were not to be slept in nor used to wipe sticky hands on, to remember that when the foreign teachers with the strange white and red faces called "Joseph" that it was him, Wel'ed, whom they meant.

But that was a long time ago.

Now, dressed in a long white robe, a worn green turban on his head, a bag with a tiny Koran in it tied about his neck on a thong, he made his way on foot toward the mountains. As a boy, in his native city, he had sometimes been able to see the mountains on clear days, but he had never cared or given them a

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thought. But that was when he was Wel'ed, or Joseph. He had a different name now: he was Abd'u'rachman, the dervish—a holy man.

The path through the foothills had been cut by the tiny hoofs of skinny goats and spindly sheep. It was rough going for a man afoot.

From the mountains he could not expect to see the city itself—it was too far, too small. But when it was in flames, perhaps then he would be able to see it. The bazaar, the police station, the mission school, the hospital and warehouses—all ablaze! Yes, it would make a brave show, visible as far as Europe, to those who could read the signs . . .

Joseph had stayed at the mission school for a while, had learned to read and write both in his own language and in that of the foreigners. He had also learned how to say their prayers and how to mend shoes. Then he grew tired of the confined life behind the high walls—to be exact, he had always been tired of it, but one day he saw a chance to escape and he did.

He found work helping Lame Umar the cobbler; not that he worked hard or often—indeed, he drifted back into the free and easy life of the bazaar, as though he'd never left it. But when the foreigners tried to get him back, Lame Umar had shaken the heavens with his cries: "What! Allow a boy born in the True Faith to be given over to infidels? Allah! Allah!" A huge crowd had gathered, muttering angrily, and the Police Commissioner had hurried the missioners away, told them he had no intention of permitting a riot over a worthless native brat. People had praised the boy and caressed him and given him money, and he felt quite a devotion to the True Faith—for the first time in his life—although that night he spent the money in the house of a Somali woman. Scented charcoal burned in a brazier while she danced for her guest, and he tasted wine, forbidden, of course, to True Believers, except for the wine of Paradise (which is nonintoxicating).

Next day a Galla leather merchant took him into his own establishment and taught him the Koran and how to judge hides and how to assist in the primitive bookkeeping he used. The Galla also gave him a new name—Mohammed Aziz—and promised to find him a wife by and by. Mohammed Aziz grew tall and sleek and ceased to patronize the Somali woman. While he was waiting for his patron to find him a wife he switched his attentions to a place where there were European women. This was expensive. He had learned quickly and had improved the fiscal methods used at the leather warehouse so skillfully that it was over a year before the Galla discovered the change. The porters who carried the hides had never liked Mohammed Aziz and they endeavored with enthusiasm to obey their master's instructions to leave

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no bone unbroken; but the young man had had a knife and he had used it well . . .

By the time Abd'u'rachman (who had been Wel'ed and Joseph and Mohammed Aziz and Libertad and several other people) reached the crest of the hills overlooking the valley of his destination, it was time to rest, to reflect on his plans. Meticulously he washed and said the prayers. The hill people might even now be watching him, and besides it would not do to step out of character. One slip might ruin the whole scheme. From the place he stood he could see three small villages huddled each in a cluster of stone huts, the strips and patches of their fields set out wherever a scrap of soil could be wrested from the rocks. In the other valleys of the range a hundred villages lay slumbering quietly—for now. For a generation the hill tribes had been peaceable, but soon, very soon, the men would gather beside their fires and, muttering to one another, would take up the red whetstones and the heavy iron knives, and sharpen one against the other . . .

It was the half-mad Spaniard in Port Saïd whom he really considered his teacher—not the missioners nor Lame Umar nor the Galla merchant.

The man called himself Duarte, and he held the passport of a certain Latin American republic which he had never visited. Very likely no one in that country was even aware that the passport had ever been issued, for every so often Duarte was obliged to pay money to the republic's consular agent—himself neither Latin nor American—to keep the passport "in order."

In the dark, dirty, cluttered shop where he sold second-hand marine equipment Duarte held school. His subject was *libertad*—liberty—and he had only one pupil, whom he called by that name. His assistant and pupil, Libertad, who had recently been called Mohammed Aziz, learned Duarte's political theory: organize in order to disorganize in order to organize anew—build in order to destroy in order to rebuild. There was more, but that was basic. For the rest, Libertad had only contempt. He never, for example, believed that man was naturally good but that governments made man evil. He *did* accept that the ruled should rebel against their rulers—but not in order that they might rule themselves. Why should they rule themselves when men of superior intelligence—men like Libertad, for instance—might rule over them?

Duarte had no desire to make money in order to live well, but somehow he *did* make money. He put it into Libertad's hands and sent him to Europe—on a passport purchased from the same consular agent—to deliver it to certain others, exiles from the country they had once called "home"—and, like himself, at odds with all governments, organi-

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zations, parties. Libertad got to Europe, but he never reached the office where Duarte's friends—their pockets and stomachs empty, their mouths full of slogans—waited hopefully. There was another office which also held the doctrine *organize, disorganize, reorganize—build, destroy, rebuild;* this other office was, in Libertad's opinion, more realistic—not inclined to take too seriously idealistic talk about the natural goodness and benevolence of man. This other office had a well-knit party behind it—and behind the party, a strong and powerful nation—and this office Libertad managed to find quickly. He offered to their cause his youth, his service, his experience, and also Duarte's money.

Not all the money, of course. He had earned his pleasure.

And here he was, in the hill country of his homeland, with the green turban of a *hadji* on his head, and wearing the white robe of a dervish. He now had a year's training behind him: for half the day he'd studied political theory and political action and history and economics; the other half of each day he had been instructed in the Koran and its commentaries and homiletics by a renegade *imam* with one eye and a cynical twisted mouth.

"Speak loudly, speak fast, and jump around a lot," the *imam* had advised. "Your hill tribesmen will scarcely know it if you misquote a *sura*—they are not theologians. Their religion consists almost entirely of hating infidels—whom they seldom see—and of making pilgrimages to sheiks' tombs—which they seldom do. Stir them up. Tell them that the sheiks cry aloud from their tombs how meritorious it is to hate the infidels."

He had gone without shoes a great part of the time to let his feet toughen up again.

The political teachers had told him: "Nationalism is, of course, obsolete, except for the nationalism of the workers' state. But meanwhile, if we can use nationalism to our advantage, we shall do so. We must be as close as we can to the anti-colonialist national movements. In newly rising, newly forming countries—raw, excitable, inexperienced—there is still danger that the ending of foreign rule *might* take place with a minimum of friction. Then the foreign governments *may* be replaced by native governments committed to Western patterns. This must not be allowed to happen!"

The pupil had fully understood. Under no circumstances must moderate governments be permitted to take root in the newly independent nations.

And in order to guarantee this, there must be violence—raw, frequent, and terrible. This way native would be turned forever against European, European against native, reprisal must succeed reprisal, vengeance must retaliate for vengeance, hatred breed hatred—deep and ir-

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reconcilable. In this way moderation would inevitably disappear.

"The trouble," his political instructor had said, "must begin in the hills."

That was why the newly and quite unofficially ordained holy man, Abd'u'rachman—the name meant Servant of the Compassionate—was in the hills now. Trouble had not yet begun. But soon, very soon . . .

Evening found him sitting close to a fire on which roasted the carcass of a fat-tailed sheep.

"We are very poor," said the Headman of the village, deprecatingly.

"Allah loves the poor," the holy man intoned, in a singsong voice.

The tribe murmured, approving.

"Ordinarily we kill sheep only on Korban Bhairam, or some other feast day—or if a blood feud has been concluded," the Headman went on. "But in honor of the *hadji* . . . it is so long since any dervish or *hadji* has visited us . . ."

"Blessed are those who give food and shelter to the servants of Allah," the holy man said, "and great shall be their portion in Paradise." He swayed as he spoke, sitting cross-legged on the ground, the only rug in the village beneath him.

The tribesmen nodded. Their eyes glittered with reflected fire, and their teeth gleamed. An old man with a grizzled beard and red-rimmed, filmy eyes—the headman's uncle—cleared his throat and spat in the fire. He turned his half-blind gaze towards the holy man, and the crowd fell silent.

"The people of this village are not attentive to their religious duties," he complained, in a quavering querulous tone. The men moved restlessly. This was evidently a favorite complaint of the old man's.

The Headman was also embarrassed. He scratched his beard.

"It is true, *ya hadji,*" he explained, defensively, "that we seldom go on pilgrimage. Perhaps that is why the crops are so scanty and so many girl children are born. But—" He shrugged, and flung his hands wide apart. "What can we do when the nearest sheik's tomb is so far from here? In the old days, when we were permitted to plunder the plains and the seacoast, we all had horses, and we could reach the holy tomb in a day." The tribesmen muttered assent. "But now," the Headman continued sadly, "we raise only enough for ourselves and the sheep. There is no plunder, no horses . . . Some of these men have *never* been on pilgrimage to a holy tomb, *ya hadji!*"

The men in question, fierce-looking, ragged fellows, hung their heads like abashed, shame-faced schoolgirls.

This was the propitious moment. The holy man held up his hand. Silence fell around the fire. He took the tiny book from the bag hanging round his neck and opened it. Slowly he repeated the first *sura*—the only one which most of the

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tribesmen knew—and they whispered it along with him.

"Bis'm'illah r'rachmani, r'rachmani . . . In the Name of Allah, the Compassionate, the Merciful . . ." He swayed as he recited, and they swayed with him. "Ye true and faithful Believers!" he suddenly cried out, in high, piercing tones. "Why need ye be poor when infidels are rich? Why should ye go afoot when unbelievers ride?" He let the thought sink in. Then—"What is said about those who add gods to God? Is it not written: 'Lie in wait for them . . . Seek them out . . . Slay them'?"

A great, drawn-out sigh issued from the crowd.

"Slay them! *Slay! SLAY!*" He leaped to his feet, flung his arm in the direction of the city. "That way lies the place of them! Are ye poor? *They are rich!* Are ye clad in rags? *They have cloth of silk and gold!* Do ye go afoot? *They have horses and mules and camels!* It is yours, all yours—*they have stolen it from you!*"

Later, much later, when the last of the mutton had been turned over to the women and children, Abd'u'rachman the holy man lay on a pile of sheepskins in the Headman's house. It had gone well, very well. Tomorrow they would lead him to the Village Beyond the Hill, then to the Village By the Stone Bridge, after that to the Village With the Three Wells . . . Soon all the hill villages would be aflame, preparing for the attack on the foreigners in the port city. That would *really* burn: the bazaar, the police station, the mission school, the hospital and warehouses—all ablaze! Yes, it should make a brave show, visible as far as Europe, for those who could read the signs.

But they would read the signs wrongly. There would be retaliation—against the wrong people. The latter, infuriated, would then retaliate against the Europeans. And so it would go—until the aims of the party would be achieved. *Organize, disorganize, then reorganize. Build, destroy, then rebuild.* And on top of the ruins—oh, high on top—would be Abd'u'rachman—who had been Libertad and Mohammed Aziz and Joseph and Wel'ed.

The revolt of the hill tribes was only the first step—even now they would be gathering around the embers of the fire. They would be muttering to one another, taking up the red whetstones and the heavy iron knives, and sharpening one against the other . . .

The wood ashes hooded the few coals still glowing. A young man poked them into flame again. The tribesmen sat around the fire, muttering.

"And will we really take the holy man to the Village Beyond the Hill?" someone asked, in the tone of one considering the incredible. "Surely it was they who stole Kamal's black ewe last year."

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There was a rumble of assent. "And the Village By the Stone Bridge," another voice said. "How could we go there with the holy man, and a blood feud still unsettled between them and us?"

"And as for the Village With the Three Wells," a third man pointed out, in an angry tone, "with all their water, yet they still steal ours." The others grunted.

The Headman said, "He does not understand these things. He is too holy."

Old Tabib, the half-blind uncle, hawked his throat clear and spat.

"Still," a young man observed, half wistfully, "it *would* be nice to plunder once again—to steal horses and silver coins and women . . . foreign women . . ."

The Headman snorted. "It *would* have been nice—fifty years ago. *Now* the city is full of foreigners with fine modern rifles." He looked at his heavy iron knife in the dim, flickering light. "The holy man doesn't understand that it would be folly for us to attack. Oh, yes, we could kill and burn, but I have no wish to enter Paradise till my beard is white, quite white." The men around him sighed.

His old uncle nodded and nodded. "Who will enter Paradise from this village where no one ever goes on pilgrimage?" he repeated his familiar complaint.

The Headman interrupted him. "Tabib ibn Selim, brother of my father, upon whom be peace! The nearest holy tomb, the nearest tomb of a sheik, is far from here. To reach it we must go afoot, past hostile villages. You know this!"

But the old man's head went on nodding. "If we had a sheik's tomb *here*," he said, "*others* would come to *us*. We would grow rich. We would be honored."

His nephew snorted. "Ask the holy man to pray for a miracle. He is . . ." His voice stopped abruptly and he stroked his beard. "By Allah, uncle, thou art right. A holy tomb all our own!"

The old man said, in the voice of one who half glimpses Paradise, "And I shall be Custodian and Guardian of this holy tomb. I will show pilgrims his green *hadji's* turban and his Koran. They will give money and call me *effendi* . . . The crops will be fruitful, and the women will bear many sons . . ."

A tall, ragged, fierce-looking tribesman held his head high. "And we, who have never gone on pilgrimage, can go every day. For the holy man will remain with us, forever and forever!"

The men muttered agreement.

"When?" asked the Headman.

"Later," his uncle whispered. "When the moon sets. *Then*."

"Even so," the Headman said, and the tribesmen nodded.

They sat around the dying fire. They took up their heavy iron knives and red whetstones, and as they waited for the moon to set they sharpened one against the other . . .

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Roland F. Lee's "Light in Darkness" is one of the twenty-two "first stories" which won special awards in EQMM's Eleventh Annual Contest. It is a straight detective story (glory be!) in the classic vein, with a provocative and perplexing problem for readers to chew their Carr-Rawson-Chestertonian (and Queenian—shades of THE CHINESE ORANGE MYSTERY!) *teeth on. Happy chewing!*

Mr. Lee was born and reared in Cleveland, Ohio. He is in his middle thirties, married, and the father of two boys. Currently, he teaches English at Wisconsin State College—his field is a special one, Nineteenth Century American literature. After three years in the Air Corps, he enrolled at Ohio State and received his Ph.D. in 1952. His thesis bore the interesting title, "Emerson and Christian Existentialism"; it was never published, but Mr. Lee is excavating in it for articles in scholarly journals. Good luck, Mr. Lee, in your digging—and in future detective stories!

LIGHT IN DARKNESS

by ROLAND F. LEE

"DID YOU SAY EVERY LIGHT?"

"I said *every* light."

"But, damn it, Barani, that can't be! Not every light!"

"But it is, Chief. And get this—not just every regular light, but a flashlight on the living-room mantel, a sunlamp in one of the bedrooms, an infra-red in the darkroom downstairs, and even the refrigerator light—they're all lit!"

Lieutenant Henrich might not have minded the lights had not the whole picture been complicated by a corpse. It was 2:30 on a blazing August afternoon, and in the study of Josiah Strong's secluded lake home lay the body of Josiah Strong himself, his skull cracked and his hair waving foolishly in the breeze from an electric fan. He lay very still. To the pathos of death had been added an insane touch: in spite of a cloudless sky and a parching sun, every electric light in the house was lit.

"It can't be," muttered Henrich, scowling at the desk lamp and floor lamp in the study. He turned them out, then walked into the large living room where three people sat silently. A handsome woman in her thirties looked up, her face white beneath a minimum of makeup; a blonde girl of about twenty stopped dabbing a handkerchief to her eyes; and a tall man of indeterminable age

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paused, cigarette in hand, and regarded the detective with the disconcerting frankness of a jungle cat. Henrich suddenly felt ill at ease. The man's features were rugged but very precise, indicating considerable power of concentration. Henrich turned to the older woman.

"Now, Mrs. Strong—your first name is Louise, isn't it? Suppose you go over the events of this morning and afternoon again, just as a kind of summary?"

She hesitated, then spoke. "Well, Josiah went to the office at about 9 this morning. He's—was an investment broker, you know. Aline and I spent the morning doing nothing in particular. She's home from college now. Josiah came home about a quarter to twelve and the three of us had lunch. He said he was staying home this afternoon."

"Did he say anything about an appointment?"

"No, but he seemed a—well, a little irritable, as though he were expecting somebody and didn't want me around."

"You had no words of any kind?"

Her dark eyes smouldered. "No, none. After lunch I took the car and went out shopping. I got back around two and found—what you see. I called the police at once and then phoned Vic—Mr. March at his studio. Aline came home soon after."

"I see." Henrich chewed thoughtfully on his lower lip. He glanced at the imperturbable Mr. March. "You were quite a bit younger than your husband, weren't you, Mrs. Strong?"

His meaning was so obvious that she flushed. "Yes, I was. I was his second wife. Aline is the daughter of his first wife. But it has been a happy marriage, as you can easily find by making inquiries, Lieutenant."

Henrich waved his hand. "No offense intended—just looking for information. One more question: when you left to go shopping, were all these lights on?"

"No. There were no lights on."

"But they were all on when you returned about 2?"

"Yes."

"You didn't turn any of them on?"

"Of course not!"

"Can you suggest any reason why somebody should have turned them on?"

"None at all, unless—well, it's like something a madman would do."

"Maybe," Henrich murmured. He turned to Aline. "Now what time did you leave the house, Miss Strong?"

She was rather pretty and she stared at him with a kind of disarming candor, but it had no effect on Henrich. "At a quarter to 1, shortly after Louise left. I walked down to the lake and along the shore—I told you before—and when I got back Louise was already home."

"Any particular reason for this walk?"

"No. It was just that father was a

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little snappish and seemed to want me out of the house—at least, he brightened up when I told him I was going out."

"I see. Did he want to know when you'd be back?"

"Why, yes, he did. I told him in about an hour, but it turned out later."

"What did your father snap at you about?"

Aline glanced uneasily at her stepmother. "He said—he said that I didn't treat Louise very well."

Mrs. Strong's rich voice cut in before Henrich could speak. "That's nonsense, Lieutenant. Josiah didn't understand the relationship between a stepdaughter and a stepmother. Really, Aline and I have been great friends, haven't we, dear?" She smiled at Aline.

Aline did not look at her as she replied almost in a whisper, "Yes, we have."

Henrich decided not to pursue the subject. "Were the lights on when you left, Miss Strong? Apparently you were the last one to see your father alive."

"Oh, no—none of them were lit that I know of."

"And can you think of any reason why they should have been put on?"

"No, I can't. As Louise says, it seems kind of—crazy."

Henrich swung around on the silent March and stared at him. Again he was reminded of a tiger placidly regarding him through the bars of a cage. "You board here, Mr. March?"

"Yes."

"And—" Henrich consulted his notebook. "Your first name is Victor. You're an artist, a portrait painter, is that right?"

"Yes."

"Who are some of your clients?"

"I can give you the names of all two of them if you want."

"Business bad?"

March shrugged. "The public is undiscerning."

"Mrs. Strong says she called you at your studio. Had you been there the previous two hours?"

"The previous six."

"Can you prove that?"

"Probably not. I had no clients today."

"You've lived here six months, Mr. March. How well did you know Mr. Strong?"

"Not very well. I didn't like him," said March simply.

Henrich loomed over the painter. "Did you kill him?"

"No," replied March without any sign of indignation. "If I had, I wouldn't have used as crude a weapon as a poker."

Henrich's face tightened. He snapped, "How did you know it was a poker? No one has said anything about the weapon yet."

"The poker in the study fireplace has recently been taken out and replaced. There's a mark in the dust where it formerly rested."

Henrich looked a trifle disappointed as he wiped his steaming face. "Not bad, Mr. March, not bad.

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And perhaps you can also tell me why all the lights are on."

March's eyes gleamed with interest. "I have evolved four possible explanations—none of which I like. It's as intriguing as a beautiful woman's smile and probably has a much simpler explanation."

Henrich was about to reply when two more people entered the room. One was a middle-aged, well-dressed man with a small mustache—he walked immediately up to Henrich. "Lieutenant, I'm Mark Oliver and this is my wife Hedda. We came as quickly as we could when you called about this terrible affair. Louise, I'm so sorry. And Aline—" Both he and his wife, a thin woman evidently bursting to talk, began to speak to Mrs. Strong.

Henrich cleared his throat. "Mr. Oliver, I wanted to ask you a few questions. You are Mr. Strong's lawyer?"

"Well, during the past two years I have handled a few matters for him." Oliver put his well-groomed hands behind his back in a studied legal pose. "We were fairly good friends. We have the next house down the lake. You can't see it, but it's only a few hundred yards away."

"Was Mr. Strong well off?"

Oliver glanced at Louise Strong. "Why, yes, as far as I know. He always seemed to have plenty, and I know he carried quite a lot of insurance."

"How much?"

"Forty thousand."

"Aline and I are joint beneficiaries, if you want to know, Lieutenant," said Mrs. Strong calmly.

"Thanks. Now did he ever make a will?"

"No, never—that is, he never mentioned it to me," said Oliver. "He didn't plan on dying soon."

There was a short silence during which everyone looked uncomfortable except Mr. March. "Probably not," Henrich murmured. "Just one more question, Mr. Oliver: can you give me an account of your movements today?"

Oliver smiled and glanced warily at his wife. "I was at the office until 11:30. Then I had lunch and—took in a stage show. Got out about two, went home, and heard the news."

Mrs. Oliver stiffened. "Mark—" she began, but Henrich smoothly interrupted her.

"And where were you, Mrs. Oliver?"

She turned angrily to Henrich. "Me? Well, I was shopping all day, but there was no one with me, and if you think that—"

"No, no," said Henrich in a soothing voice. "No one's accusing you, Mrs. Oliver. It's only that this is a murder case, and a very peculiar one. We have to check on everybody."

"Peculiar?" The word came from Oliver who had been looking around as though something disturbed him. "What in the name—why are all the lights on?"

Henrich suddenly looked weary.

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"*That* is what we'd like to know. Right now I'm going to look around the house. Come along if you like. And I'd like you to come, Mrs. Strong."

With the exception of Aline and Mrs. Oliver, the entire group rose and went into the study. The body was covered now, and two husky young men were preparing a stretcher.

"I turned off the two lights in here," said Henrich. "At least, there was no fire burning." He shook his head perplexedly and went back through the living room into the dining room where the overhead lights and two wall lamps were still blazing.

"This is fantastic!" Oliver muttered behind the Lieutenant.

Henrich proceeded to the kitchen. "You ain't seen nothin' yet." He pointed to the refrigerator, the door of which hung open revealing the light on inside. The ceiling light and the overhead lights in the breakfast nook were also on. Mrs. Strong closed the refrigerator door, after glancing apologetically at Henrich. The incident gave a touch of the commonplace to the situation, as though a prosaic mind were tidying up after a madman.

Henrich led the way down to the basement where a gas furnace stood in the middle of the floor. Three bulbs were on between the open beams of the basement ceiling.

Henrich stopped before a heavy door and pointed through a tiny glass window. A wall light and an infra-red lamp were burning in what was evidently a darkroom. He tried the door, but it was locked. "Where's the key?"

March reached up behind a rafter and produced a key with which he unlocked the door. Henrich stared at the rafter, then at March, but said nothing. He entered the darkroom and after a quick examination of the sink and cupboards came out, letting the door lock automatically behind him. He opened a storage door to reveal still another light burning.

"There is evidence here," said March, "of a painstaking mind at work."

Henrich simply glanced at him. They went back upstairs and started down the hall off which three bedrooms opened. Hall, bedroom, and bathroom lights were all lit, and in one bedroom, the Strongs', a sunlamp was shining brilliantly.

"Who used this?" asked Henrich.

Mrs. Strong shut it off. "Josiah mostly. But I did too, sometimes."

Henrich wiped his forehead and lifted his arms as though his shirt were sticking. They returned to the living room. The afternoon sun was beginning to droop, and its rays, through the venetian blinds, traced patterns on the carpet.

"Turn those damn lights off," said Henrich to Barani. "And now—" The silent group knew what was coming, and come it did—almost two hours of it. Henrich went over

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and over their stories, drawing out more details and checking them one against the other. At the end of that time Louise Strong looked faint, Aline was sobbing quietly, Mark Oliver was irritated, and Mrs. Oliver indignant. Victor March sat motionless—as if he were a Hindu practicing self-control. Henrich was a mass of sweat.

"That's all for now," the Lieutenant said peevishly, "except don't leave on any distant trips. And I want you, Mr. March, to come down to headquarters with me."

March glanced up. "Are you booking me?"

"No. Just want to hear your four theories about those lights."

Henrich, March, and Barani had barely got into the police sedan when the artist turned to the Lieutenant. "Are you leaving a man in the house for the night?"

"Yes—Sheffield is going over the papers with Oliver. Then he's coming back. Why? Do you think the women need a guard?"

March did not answer directly. "I suggest that you tell your man to stay until dark, then leave. Tell him to make sure everybody knows what he's going to do."

Henrich's red face grew redder. "Just who do you think you are? Caesar on horseback? We're the police, and *you*—in case you've forgotten, *Mr.* March—are going down to headquarters for questioning."

"After your man leaves, we can then make arrangements to wind up this case tonight," went on March, ignoring Henrich's rage.

The Lieutenant roared. "I think we've got this case pretty well cleaned up already! Maybe you didn't notice what that darkroom key meant. Only somebody living in the house would know where to find it so he could turn the darkroom lights on. That narrows it to you, Mrs. Strong, and Aline Strong—or any combination of you three. Personally I'll settle for you. You've got gall enough for anything."

"As a matter of fact, perhaps I have," agreed March thoughtfully.

Barani laughed. "He's a modest one, chief."

"Merely accurate," said March. "Now let's get back to the point: have you decided what those lights mean?"

"They might mean nothing at all," Henrich answered belligerently. "They might have been turned on by some bright guy—like you—to cause confusion, or to make it look like a madman." He glowered at March.

"Not bad. But wrong, quite wrong. Any other ideas?"

"No. But we want to hear about those four possible explanations of yours. Or maybe you've decided on only one by now?"

"I have. There is a fifth explanation—the only one that fits."

"A lunatic?"

"No, a genius. A genius with an inspired touch."

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"You admire odd things, Mr. March," observed Henrich.

"I admire excellence in any line."

"That being the case, I'm almost afraid to ask you the next question. Are you what is known as a lady-killer?"

Barani leaned back in the driver's seat in order to hear plainly. March's lips twitched, but he did not quite smile.

"I see your drift," said the artist. "But you're wrong. Aline is just a kid, and between Louise Strong and myself there is only the warm, pure affection of brother and sister, a thing of beauty radiating its pristine beams into—"

Henrich snarled. "Then how come you're living there? Suppose I draw you a diagram: there's the older husband, none too pleasant, who is found murdered; he leaves plenty of dough to a much younger wife, who still bulges a dress in the right places; and just by chance, living in the same house, is—"

"An artist," said March. "And artists are notorious for their loose morals, aren't they?"

"You think we couldn't make a case out of that?"

March shrugged. "You probably could—provided you leave the lights out."

"All right then, how come you're living there?"

"Six months ago," replied March, "I painted Aline Strong's portrait—at her father's request. Grasping as he was, he still had a streak of vanity that could lead him to extravagance. I was so taken by the scenery around the house that I asked if I might board there. Surprisingly, Strong agreed. Call it a whim of his if you like—or perhaps he thought of himself as a sort of patron to the arts."

"And there is nothing between you and Mrs. Strong?"

"Not a thing."

Henrich was silent for a few moments. "You know," he commented, "if you were to take up lying, I imagine you'd be pretty good at it."

March looked indifferently out the window. "I thought you were interested in all those lights being on. Do you want to hear what I've worked out for tonight?"

"We'll hear it," said Henrich, "but I won't guarantee we'll go for it."

March settled back in his seat and began to talk . . .

At 9 o'clock that night the waves lapped at the shore behind the Strong and Oliver houses. Through the trees the latter house showed a few lights, but the Strong house was black, completing the paradox: lit up in daytime, dark at night. Inside the Strong house the only sounds were the hum of an electric clock and the sturdy ticking of an old grandfather clock.

A flashlight beam shone suddenly, and a figure glided down the steps to the Strong basement. Quickly the beam moved toward the darkroom door. A gloved hand reached up for the key, then unlocked the door.

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Shadows moved swiftly as the door closed and the overhead light in the darkroom came on. There were sly sounds of drawers being quietly opened, then louder noises, and finally a faint cry of vexation—as though the search was unrewarding. At last the light went out and the searcher appeared at the door.

"You're a little late," said a voice. "I've already got them."

Two flashlight beams met face to face. Behind the lights stood Victor March and Mark Oliver, their faces slightly weird in the light coming from below. Though the night was warm, Oliver wore gloves in addition to a hat and topcoat. He recovered quickly from the shock.

"Ah, you already have them, Mr. March," he murmured. "That changes matters, doesn't it?"

"Not as much as you might think," said March. "It leaves you in relatively the same position."

"I take it you too want money. Unfortunate. Everybody around here seems to want money. Is there no honesty left?" A note of plaintive humor had crept into Oliver's voice.

"Is that why you killed Strong? To put an end to his—it's a nasty word—his blackmail?"

Oliver cocked his head on one side, and his eyes glinted in the reflected light. He paused before answering, "Why, yes, it is a nasty word, isn't it? And it's a nasty business too. Josiah insisted on having too much. He never did know moderation, did Josiah."

"So you killed him?"

"Yes, I killed him. Unfortunate. I messed the job rather badly."

March smiled. "I won't ask you which of those two items you consider the unfortunate part, but your work with the lights was brilliant—and almost successful."

"It is always so pleasant to be appreciated. But suppose we get down to facts. How much?"

March appeared to calculate. "Well, in addition to fraud, there's now murder hanging over your head. Shall we say ten thousand—for a start?"

Oliver's right hand moved, then gleamed. March was looking into the muzzle of an automatic. "Shall we say precisely zero, Mr. March? You seem to have Josiah's weakness. Avarice is one of the seven deadly sins."

"Five thousand then," said March.

"My bid is nothing," replied Oliver, smiling. "I always thought you were intelligent, but I begin to doubt it now. I cannot risk letting you go. I have killed once—once more will make no difference."

March seemed fascinated by the gun as it rose slowly and pointed at his heart. A loud explosion rang through the basement, the gun went flying out of Oliver's hand, and the lights came on. From behind the furnace rushed Henrich and Barani, the latter with a smoking pistol. They grasped Oliver, who had fallen back holding his hand, his face white with pain.

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March snapped his flashlight off. "Signed, sealed, and delivered, Lieutenant, as promised."

"Go over that business of the lights again, will you, March?" asked Henrich, back in his office. "The boys would like to hear it."

March closed the notebook in which he had been idly sketching. "In addition to being a fascinating puzzle, the lights were really the key to the mystery. And it was a key we had to use fast. Given one free day, he would have got away with it."

"But we still would have known Oliver did it," objected Henrich.

"You mean *I* would have known. From your point of view, it would have been only reasoning—there was no evidence that would have stood up in court . . . You see, it was really a process of elimination. Here was a whole house all lit up on a blazing hot afternoon. Evidently they had been turned on by the murderer. The question was—*why?*

"Why should anyone in his senses do a thing like that? Which question, of course, brought up the first possibility—that it was done by a madman. But that didn't seem to fit anyone connected with the case.

"There were four other possible explanations," the artist went on. "Could it have been to get more light? Ridiculous on so bright a day. Could it have been to produce heat? Again, the day was boiling hot, and besides the furnace was infinitely better for that purpose. Could it have been to act as some sort of beacon? Well, Strong's house isn't visible for a great distance in any direction, even from the lake—the trees shut it off on that side; besides, from outside it's practically impossible to see that the lights are on in broad daylight. No, those three possibilities didn't stand up—no more than the lunatic theory did. So we come to theory Number Five—the solution you suggested, Lieutenant. You were closer than you realized.

"You said it might have been done just to confuse the police. And so it was—but to confuse them in a certain way and for a definite purpose. There was only one logical reason for turning on every light in the house, and that was—*to conceal the fact that one light was on.*"

"But where does that get us?" asked Barani.

"Everywhere. That meant that there was at least one light in the house that the murderer *could not* turn off and which he desperately did not want noticed. But if he couldn't turn it off, he could conceal it—by turning all the other lights on, even the sunlamp and the light in the refrigerator. At that point things began to clear up—light up, you might say. The only lights that were hard to get at were the ones in the darkroom—because the door was kept locked. Furthermore, they suggested a certain activity on Strong's part which the murderer also did not want noted by the police. You mentioned, Lieutenant, that the obscure position of the darkroom key up on

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the rafter meant that the murderer must have been someone inside the house. Actually, it meant just the opposite—that the killer was someone *outside* the house, since he didn't know where that key was hidden.

"Immediately, of course, I thought of Oliver—an outsider. Suppose Strong had been working in the darkroom when Oliver came to see him and Strong had gone upstairs without turning off the darkroom lights. Suppose, after killing Strong, Oliver had to get something Strong had been developing. If Oliver rushed downstairs, he would have been confronted with a locked door. It locks automatically, as you saw, and it's a very heavy door . . . What is suggested? Blackmail—Strong blackmailing Oliver, and the evidence locked in the darkroom."

"That's just what happened," said Henrich. "Strong had prints and negatives proving Oliver guilty of fraud. He had been blackmailing Oliver for more than a year. Fiendish about it too. With each payment he'd give Oliver one of the prints as a receipt, but keep the negative.

"Today—or it's yesterday now—Oliver had an appointment with Strong for 1:15, but didn't get there until a little later. He was supposed to pay five thousand dollars, but he came prepared to settle once and for all. When Strong came up and showed him the fresh prints, Oliver figured that the negatives must be down in the darkroom at that moment. He decided to kill Strong and take both prints and negatives at one swoop, but he knew speed was essential because Strong had told him that Aline was due back almost immediately. Well, he killed Strong, but when he got downstairs he couldn't open the darkroom door. And he couldn't locate the key. It wasn't on Strong, and he couldn't force the lock or break down the door. He was desperate. He knew those lights on in the darkroom would invite a search by the police, and while he reasoned—correctly—that the negatives were safe from a routine search, he also realized that they could not escape a thorough search. Then he had what March called a touch of genius.

"He dashed around turning lights on—every light he could find. That way no one would notice the darkroom lights particularly. Then he went back to his own house, hoping to return later for the negatives. Our little tour of the house showed him where the key was hidden, so he returned the same night."

March rose, tore a page from his notebook, and put it on Henrich's desk. "Anytime you get an especially interesting little problem, Lieutenant, you might call me in. Good night."

"Anytime you want a job—" began Henrich, then stopped as Barani held the page from the notebook in front of him. On the paper was a neat drawing of himself and Barani gazing in hopeless perplexity at a huge electric bulb—lit!

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **A. H. Z. CARR**

TITLE: ***Payment in Kind***

TYPE: Crime Story

LOCALE: Near Paris

COMMENTS: *An appetizing tale of sauces, stuffings, picklings, and gravies — of such epicurean delights as turbot à l'Asturienne and bombe glacée Archiduc — and of one of the most charming rogues and most amiable con-men you have met in a long time . . .*

NEVER GO TO THE RESTAURANT DE la Poule au Pot, in Saint Rémy-les-Chevreuses, near Paris, on a Sunday. Go on a weekday. On Sunday limousines clutter up the courtyard, one competes for a table with elegance in striped trousers and in silks, and Madame Hublet, the proprietress and cook, shrugs her shoulders and does what she can. But on, say, a Tuesday — ah, what a difference! Then Mme. Hublet has time to let her dishes simmer one by one, to give personal attention to her incredible sauces, to superintend her admirable stuffings, to baste each fowl ceaselessly, to turn it methodically — in a phrase, to achieve that perfection which has given her food its current renown among the gourmets of Paris.

On a certain Tuesday, as I sat in La Poule au Pot, dining lightly off beef pickled in Madeira, and served in a sauce made of little rabbits crushed with truffles and whole sweetbreads — on this day my attention was attracted to the only other occupied table, where an argument was in progress. The aggressive party in this argument was Mme. Hublet herself, her gray hair streaked excitedly across her red face, her hands violating the air, her expansive bosom quivering with emotion underneath her blue apron, her voice hoarse with indignation. I was concerned, for cooks of the caliber of Mme. Hublet should never be agitated; agitation makes them careless with their seasoning. Consequently, I looked with disfavor at her provoker. He was a young, rather plump, delicately featured French-

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man, with a small black mustache, and of immaculate appearance. As he waited for Mme. Hublet's outburst to be finished, he leaned back negligently, with entire poise, in his chair.

In time, she stopped for breath. Whereupon the young man lifted his shoulders in resignation, and said, "It is true, madame, that I cannot pay in money for the excellent dinner I have just eaten. But I can pay you in kind — a method which is now approved everywhere by leading bankers."

"In kind? What is that?" Mme. Hublet was taken aback.

"Listen, then, madame. Why is your cooking so magnificent? The materials? That is absurd, of course. Any fool can buy a chicken. No — your genius, the recipes that are the expression of that genius — these are what you sell, these are what I have just eaten. Is it not so?"

"True," she said unwillingly, yet impressed by his logic. "But —"

"A moment. I have eaten, then, a recipe. Good. I shall give you, in payment, a new recipe."

"A recipe! What the devil do I want with a recipe! I!"

"Ah! But this, you understand, is not a recipe such as one finds every day. You have heard of Zimmermann, the famous *cordon bleu* of Strasbourg, the chef to whose restaurant kings and dictators come in droves?"

"What has Zimmermann to do with this affair?"

"You have heard of him?"

"Who has not?"

"Well, then, this is the secret recipe for the sauce that has made Zimmermann revered throughout all the world — the Sauce Zimmermann, that one can taste today nowhere but in his restaurant in Strasbourg."

There was an air about this young man that inspired confidence. Mme. Hublet was obviously impressed. She moistened her lips, and said, "How do you know this recipe?"

"Oh, madame!"

"Bah! I do not believe it."

"Very well, then. Call the gendarmes if you wish. Take me to the magistrate. Put me in jail. But you will be the loser, madame; you will lose this recipe, a whisper of which in your ear will make you equal to — no, greater than Zimmermann — a recipe that will bring you thousands of new clients from the corners of the world, that will make your restaurant a new Mecca for all epicures."

"Ah, if you are deceiving me," cried Mme. Hublet, tempted beyond endurance by this eloquent promise. "However, I agree. Tell me the recipe; for this meal I make you the guest of the house."

"Agreed," cried the young man, drawing a notebook from his pocket. "This sauce, which I have no doubt you will name Sauce Hublet, is to be used only with duck, particularly with potted duck, braised and served in a covered dish, in the manner of Zimmermann."

"Yes, yes. The recipe. What is it? François," she called to the waiter who was listening with a gloomy look, "a pencil and paper, quickly!"

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"Well, then, the recipe. Into two liters of stock made from veal cooked with tomatoes, add two liters of wine of Tarragona, Muscatel, and *fine* champagne, in equal portions. This is to be brought to, but by no means beyond, the boil. Add the livers of ten geese, which have previously been fried in their own fat, and which are chopped small, to provide a good consistency. Pour in slowly the juice of an onion. Then flavor with basil, rosemary, savory, hyssop, origan, thyme, laurel, sage, Cayenne pepper, paprika, and lemon. Cook and stir for an hour until the mixture has achieved a uniform, rich brown color, skimming off whatever fat rises to the surface." He paused impressively. "There it is."

"Aha!" Mme. Hublet cried triumphantly. "That is well understood. The hyssop. Who would have thought of that? Ah, he's a shrewd one, that Zimmermann. And this — this, then, is the veritable recipe of his sauce?"

"Madame!" The young man said, half-rising, with an angry look. "I have said that it is."

"No, no, then." She motioned him back to his chair. "No offense. Perhaps" — she winked — "you have learned some other recipes of M'sieu Zimmermann, *hein?*"

He winked in reply, and the proprietress beamed. "You will permit me to give you a cognac, with the compliments of the house? Good. François — a cognac for m'sieu — out of the green bottle. To refresh your memory, m'sieu. You will wait until we have spoken again?"

He winked once more, expressively, and with a satisfied smile she hurried into the kitchen, recipe in hand, eyes glowing with anticipation. The young man sniffed at his brandy, tasted it, and made an explosive noise. Catching my eye, he said, "Bah! She calls this cognac? It is scarcely better than eau-de-vie. A fine way to treat a guest, is it not, m'sieu? And she expects recipes for this. Say there! François! Tell madame that I do not accept this cognac — no, neither with compliments nor without. To the devil with the green bottle! If she wants any more recipes, let her send me a *fine* to take away the taste of this canal water!"

The waiter, who was stupid, pursed his lips, shrugged, retired, and came back with another glass of brandy. As he tasted it, the young man's face cleared. He smiled at François, and said, "Do not look so sad, my friend. You are thinking about your tip? Don't worry. You, too, shall be paid in kind. I shall give you a tip worth twenty — a hundred times — what I might have left on your tray."

François, whose face had at first fallen at this confirmation of his fears, now looked up with signs of interest.

"And what sort of tip is that, m'sieu?"

"You are interested in horse races?"

"I? Not at all."

"But you know where to place a bet?"

"Yes, I have a friend."

"Good. Tomorrow, at Auteuil, in the fourth race, a horse named For-

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tunatus runs. Bet a thousand francs on that fellow and you make ten thousand. Don't ask me how I know. I have friends among the jockeys; these things are arranged, you understand."

François looked doubtful. "But can I be sure —"

"If you lose, I myself shall refund you the money."

François scratched his head. "But if m'sieu has no way of paying for his dinner, except by a recipe —"

"Oh, that's what's troubling you? It's true I am broke for the moment, but I shall make enough money on that race to pay you a thousand times over. Here is my card," he went on, as François, dimly aware of a fallacy, but unable quite to locate it, made a grimace. "Wait, I shall write down the name of the horse. There. Keep it. And if anything goes wrong — but that's impossible — you can look me up."

François read the card, and was evidently favorably affected.

"Ah, m'sieu le Comte," he said, more cheerfully, "if you assure me against loss, then it's another matter. A thousand thanks, m'sieu."

"It is nothing, my friend."

The young man raised his glass again, and said to me, "Your health, m'sieu." Then, with no further preliminaries, he rose, and came over to my table. "M'sieu is an American?"

"Yes," I said, rather pleased by the diversion.

"You permit me to sit at your table?"

"With pleasure."

"Thank you. Americans fascinate me. I, m'sieu, am deeply conscious of the debt which my nation owes to yours. I feel always a sense of obligation to your countrymen. To me, m'sieu, a war debt is a debt of honor."

I said smiling, "A unique attitude."

"Unfortunately, that is true," he answered solemnly. "But I myself have personally returned to your country more than twenty million dollars, for which I have neither asked nor received recognition." Before I could catch my breath, he went on, "Permit me to present myself." He reached into his pocket and brought out a small card-case from which he extracted a card. I accepted it, and read, "Comte Lucien de Ganneron de Lavardin," with the name of the most exclusive club in Paris.

Exchange of cards struck me as an antiquated formality, but not wishing to fail in politeness, I took my wallet from my pocket and gave him my card, whereupon he rose and bowed, and I, feeling rather a fool, did likewise.

I must have raised an eyebrow as I read his address, for when he had seated himself again, he said, first making sure that the waiter was out of earshot. "Allow me to confess, m'sieu, that I am no longer a member of the club named on that card. However, I have never been able to afford new cards, so I continue to use these. A matter of economy, you know," he concluded, smiling a little sadly.

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Trying to find some tactful way of asking a question that had occurred to me, I said, "Pardon me, m'sieu, if I am inquisitive, but it seems to me that it was not entirely unexpected on your part, this difficulty with madame."

"You mean, it was not a question of a purse absent-mindedly left at home? But no, m'sieu. To be frank, I knew that I had no money. One generally knows that."

"And yet," I began tentatively.

"And yet I dared to eat here? Listen," he said, leaning forward confidentially, "I shall be frank with you. For months, now, I have eaten in the best restaurants in France, without paying a sou."

His candor enchanted me. "Really?" I asked. "You have eaten every day by means of this Sauce Zimmermann, of which I heard you speak?"

He looked around cautiously. "M'sieu, I place myself in your hands. Because you are an American, a man obviously of honor and sentiment, for whom I feel a certain liking, although we have but now met — for these reasons, I am frank with you. It is true, m'sieu, this sauce Zimmermann has fed me now for a long while. How else? I am an epicure, m'sieu, a descendant of a long line of epicures. Other men live by eating; I live for eating. Deprive other men of food, and they die; but deprive me of perfectly cooked soups and meats, of tasty sauces, of vintage wines, of the best in vegetables and fruits and cheeses, and I commit suicide. What, I, a Ganneron de Lavardin, eat the refuse which is served to the rabble? M'sieu, you are an American; to you cookery is not what it is to us; you cannot understand. Why," he asked with tears of genuine emotion in his eyes, "why is it that the French who have a thousand political parties, all hating one another, nevertheless fight so bravely, so unanimously against an invader?"

I professed ignorance.

He went on warmly, "I shall tell you why, m'sieu. Not because of love of country. Bah! We are not children, to die for the flag. Nor for our women. We prefer, when available, the women of other countries. No, m'sieu. We fight to protect the French cuisine. Tell a Frenchman that the republic is in danger, and he says, 'I should worry.' But tell him that his favorite restaurant is in danger, that the chef may be conscripted, the menu adulterated with German cookery — ah, then he becomes a tiger, your Jacques Citizen."

The Count mopped his forehead, and I had a chance to say, "But, if I may ask, have you succeeded invariably with this Sauce Zimmermann?"

He shrugged. "Invariably? That would be too much to hope, m'sieu. A few proprietors have been obdurate, traitors to the art they profess, not interested in the secret of Zimmermann, concerned only with their filthy francs. But usually I try to choose restaurants where exists the proper jealousy of one great chef for another. As a result, I eat as well as any man in

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France, m'sieu, twice a day. True, in time, no doubt, if I continue, the secret of Sauce Zimmermann may cease to be a secret. True, also, it is advisable that I do not visit the same restaurant twice. This keeps me moving. But I have an automobile, you understand, and I do not object to a little hardship in the interest of my digestion."

"And — forgive me — this Sauce Zimmermann — it is the authentic sauce of the master?"

He looked at me shrewdly.

"Ah, m'sieu, I see you are not to be deceived. Well, I rely on your goodwill; I shall be frank. It is not the sauce of Zimmermann. But devil take it, it is a sauce better than Zimmermann's, one which I invented myself, and to which I have given his name, to honor a great chef. Besides, who knows but myself, and now you? The others name the sauce after themselves, and are just as happy in their ignorance."

At this point I threw the conventions overboard. "But — you will pardon the rude question — you have other expenses? Your lodging? Your clothes, which, if I may say so, seem to be the product of a fashionable tailor?"

He smiled, with a flash of excellent, white teeth. "In each case, m'sieu — my lodging, my clothes, the essence for my automobile, I have ways of paying — in kind. The payment in kind — it is a passion with me. A donkey can pay a debt with money if he has it. But when one has not a sou and still pays — ah, you imagine, that takes a certain talent. Only by payment of that sort was I able to return to your country those million dollars of which I spoke."

I hesitated, torn between multiple curiosities, but I put aside the other questions. "It was not, then, your personal fortune which you gave?"

He shook his head, a little regretfully. "No, m'sieu. It was not so easy as all that. You are interested?" I assured him that I was. Glancing at an elegant watch on his wrist, he said, "It will take a little time, this story, but I can stay for a while." As he spoke, he was toying absent-mindedly with his empty cognac glass; and his objections, when I motioned to François, were exquisitely polite.

After a few moments of dreamy reflection, the Count began, "I remember very well how I first met her."

"Her?" I asked. "Who?"

"Forgive me — I am stupid — I anticipate myself. Listen, then, m'sieu. I was sitting in the Café Bric-a-brac, near the Luxembourg — you know it, perhaps? Ah, you should. An excellent chef — one who understands perfectly the art of French cooking — a Hungarian. But I digress. I had come into the Bric-a-brac, I remember, for a five o'clock snack, consisting, if I am not mistaken, of some hot Lyon sausages, *quenelles* of pike with mushrooms, and a bottle of first-class Beaujolais, with a very good bowl of fruit. While I ate a peach, before my little conversation with the proprietor, I was reading *L'Action Française*

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— the only paper in France, m'sieu, for a man of noble birth."

The Count accompanied this statement with a wide, sweeping gesture, which he used frequently, with great effect, for emphasis.

"Well, it appears that a certain American young lady — her family name I shall conceal, but her Christian name was Caroline — this young lady of great wealth has come to Paris, saying to our press that she will never marry an American who is sure to be interested only in money, but a European — a Frenchman or Spaniard or Italian — someone who understands how to live. This sentiment, m'sieu, struck me with force; I think to myself, ah, there is a sensible girl in a billion, and a pretty one, too. Her photograph was in *L'Action*. I was sighing to contrast my situation with that of the lucky fellow who would marry her, when, m'sieu, just as in the cinema — I hear American voices — I look up — I see a couple seating themselves on the terrace, next to me; and I recognize this young lady, this millionairess, whose picture is even now before me.

"M'sieu, only fools deny that there is a fatality in events. I am a man of simple faith. I had, I saw, been chosen for this affair. It would have been positively heretical to pretend otherwise. I said a little prayer, you understand, asking for strength to carry out my appointed task, and I waited for my opportunity.

"Soon it arrived. At the table with my young lady was a young man, an American, prosperous in appearance, tall, and with a small, fair head, very bony. Between them suddenly an angry quarrel broke out, and their voices came distinctly to my table.

"I have enough English to understand even Americans, m'sieu. This, then, was the cause of the quarrel. The young man, whom the girl addressed as Bill, protested that Caroline should not have told the reporters of her intention to marry a European. He was bitter, Bill. She had, he said, by a single utterance exposed herself to ridicule in America and to annoyance in France. He urged her to give no more interviews to the reporters except when he was present. He said that she did not yet comprehend her responsibilities to her family and her class.

"To this Caroline replied that she was twenty-one, and did not intend to be treated as a child. She had not asked Bill, she said, to follow her to France, to meddle, to give advice. She desired him to be less officious.

"He was a stubborn fellow, Bill. He did not retreat, no, not a millimeter. He said that now she needed a guardian even more than before, because she had come into her fortune. He said she was a sweet girl, and that he loved her, but that she was not quite shining. By this m'sieu, he intended to cast an aspersion upon her intellect. Yet he loved her. Only an American, m'sieu, would think to show his love for a woman by insults.

"Caroline now grew pale, and said to Bill that he was an unpleasant fellow. Then they began, without re-

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straint, to tell the opinions which they held, each of the other, which were very astonishing, these opinions. Finally he cried rudely that she was a small idiot, and she wept, demanding that he leave her. But he would not.

"M'sieu, I cannot bear to see a woman weep. In my chivalry, I am like the Comte d'Orsay, who once in a cafe heard an atheist speak rudely of the Holy Virgin, and challenged him, saying, 'It isn't that I am much of a Catholic, but I never allow a woman to be insulted in my presence.' So with me. I said to myself, 'Now, Lucien!' I rose. I approached them. I bowed, I addressed Caroline.

"Forgive me, mademoiselle,' I said in English, 'but I have overheard your conversation, and I observe your distress. If I can serve you, if you wish to be rid of this annoying fellow —'

"She was startled; she hesitated; then she smiled. 'Thank you,' she said. 'But it is not necessary.'

"This Bill, however, now rose and said to me, 'Get out.'

" 'No, no, my fellow,' I replied to him. 'That is not to be so easily accomplished. One does not insult ladies with impunity in the presence of a Ganneron de Lavardin, I can tell you.'

" 'Once more,' he said, 'get out — or else!'

"This jargon, m'sieu, I comprehended because of his expression, which was not amiable. I snapped my fingers in his face, and said, 'Bah!'

"Then he advanced upon me around the table, ignoring the protests of mademoiselle, who also rose to her feet. I am a strong fighter, m'sieu; I was about to give this fellow a good kick in the stomach, when without warning he seized me by the coat collar, turned me around, and propelled me into the street. Here he released me, and at once, like a wounded lion, I struck him on the shin. With a cry he made a vicious motion to attack my stomach. I put myself into a position of defense, whereupon the assassin treacherously hit my chin with his clenched fist, felling me to the ground, where I lay unconscious."

The Count's dramatic gestures grew so animated, here, that a sweep of his arm knocked over his brandy glass. Fortunately, it was almost empty, but I had it refilled; and after the correct apologies for his clumsiness, he resumed.

"When I awoke, m'sieu, I lay in a hospital, and around me were doctors, nurses, police, reporters, photographers, and many others. Having comprehended the situation through one eyelid, while they still thought me inert, I muttered, as if to myself, 'Traitor! Vile coward, to strike an unsuspecting man!' Here some said, 'Aha! He speaks,' while others cast reproachful looks upon Bill, who stood at one side.

"At last I opened my eyes, and an official who stood at the bed asked me if I wished to make a charge against this Bill. I said, 'A charge? To settle a personal attack in the police court? I, a Ganneron de Lavardin, a member of the ancient nobility? Never,

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m'sieu *l'inspecteur*. Away with this charge, this process of law. This man has insulted me. Very good. M'sieu *l'inspecteur*, you have his address? Excellent. My friends will call on him tomorrow; that is all.'

"This speech, m'sieu, was received with great approval by everyone, except by Mademoiselle Caroline and the fellow Bill, who did not well understand our language. I addressed myself, in English, to Caroline. 'Fear nothing, mademoiselle,' I said, 'Your honor, as well as mine, shall be avenged by my sword.' She was a sweet child, m'sieu. She said, 'But you do not intend surely to fight a duel because of a little thing like this. Why, Bill does not know anything about swords.'

"Upon hearing this, my doubts were resolved. I said, 'Mademoiselle, there is no escape. The code demands it. If he does not wish to fight, then let him apologize or depart from Paris.'

"Bill now said, 'I shall be damned if I do.'

'And also,' I responded wittily, 'you will assuredly be damned if you do not.'

"Here I was interrupted.

"A waiter from the Bric-a-brac, a rude fellow, thrust under my nose the bill for the meal I had eaten there. Observe the pettiness of this attitude, m'sieu, that seeks to extract money from the injured. But I am not without resource at such moments. A search begins for my pocketbook, and it develops, then, that in the scuffle my pocket has been picked. I have been robbed! I exclaim; I make threats against the Bric-a-brac; the sympathetic listeners take my part; and in the babble the waiter departs abashed.

"Now, m'sieu, it appears that mademoiselle has been recognized, and this small affair has become a matter of importance for all the journals of Paris. The police had no sooner departed, than reporters began to demand interviews and photographs. Bill took Caroline by the arm, and in spite of her angry objections and the protests of the reporters, escorted her from the room. At once the reporters turned to me for my account of the matter, and you may well believe, m'sieu, that I gave it to them.

"Well, m'sieu, you imagine, the next morning I look in the newspapers to read the accounts of this affair. Would you believe? I look in every journal, I examine every corner. Not even one word. Not one. I am in despair. But not for long. My good angel does not desert me. That morning, to the hotel where I lodge, comes a certain M'sieu Ferris, an American very rich, a banker, a gentleman well known in Paris.

"You understand, M'sieu, my hotel, which I change frequently for the sake of variety — well, this hotel is respectable, it is even chic, for I do not patronize the other sort. I receive M'sieu Ferris in my apartment. He is not a great talker; he comes at once to the point. He says that because of the family of mademoiselle, it is not

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desirable that the newspapers should publish this affair. He has, therefore, arranged everything with messieurs the reporters and messieurs the editors. Now he has come to me. I am about to send a challenge. Well, this also must go no further, he says. He does not wish to invoke the law. He prefers to deal with me. Here he takes from his pocket a check book.

"Now, m'sieu, was my moment of inspiration. Another in my place, what would he have done? He would first have been insulted; then he would have named a sum; finally, he would have haggled like a fishwife. I confess, I was tempted. But I looked from the check book to M'sieu Ferris. I did not protest. I did not become angry. I said, with great politeness, 'M'sieu, listen if you please. I pardon your error. It was natural. I am a poor man. I need money. But I am also a proud man. My name, it is true, is no longer famous as in the days before that parvenu Napoléon; but even today a Ganneron de Lavardin does not accept money for insults. Put away your check book.'

"He looked at me with surprise, and put his check book away. I continued, 'I do not wish to kill this M'sieu Bill, who knows nothing of sword-play. The affair can be settled simply. Let me hear from his lips that he regrets this attack upon me; let me hear from the lips of mademoiselle, on whose behalf I have acted, that she is satisfied, and we shall forget everything.'

"This speech impressed profoundly M'sieu Ferris. He now rose, extending his hand, and addressed me. 'M'sieu le Comte,' he said, 'you must forgive me. I shall not deceive you. I believed you an impostor, like a thousand false titles in Europe today. But you are a gentleman, one sees. Now I, on my part, shall arrange matters as you wish. The insult will be repaired. You will have your apology. I myself shall speak to Bill. Also, mademoiselle will express her satisfaction.' And with these words, he left me.

"M'sieu, that afternoon I received an invitation to dine with M'sieu Ferris. You imagine that I was not displeased, for I had begun to kick myself for this chivalry of mine, this honor that is frightened of a check book. But the invitation restored my confidence.

"Well, m'sieu, everything goes well. At this dinner, I receive the apology of Bill — not perhaps enthusiastic, but in proper form — and the thanks of mademoiselle. We become friendly, mademoiselle and I. As always, I am frank. I make no secret of my poverty. I explain why my ancient title does not appear in the Almanach de Gotha — a long story, m'sieu. In a word, mademoiselle looks upon me with favor; M'sieu Ferris is amiable; and only Bill is silent.

"Let us be brief, m'sieu. Caroline permits me to call again. Then, since matters are prospering, I go at once to a friend of mine, a man of money. Later on he proved to be an unrefined type, this fine fellow, without regard

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for the sacred ties of friendship. But now he is still my friend. To him I explain the situation, and on my expectations, at an interest of two hundred per cent, he consents to lend me a sum with which to capture the heart of Caroline. Also, I obtain from him the loan of a small car — which you see there, m'sieu, in the courtyard.

"Well, my affairs advance, m'sieu, beyond my dreams. Within a week Caroline and I are inseparable. M'sieu Ferris, her man of business, does not, perhaps, approve; Bill, who loves her, is in despair; but what can they do? She prefers me, you understand. We go everywhere together, she and I, all most respectably, but intimately, happily married in a tiny, vine-covered cottage. It astounds me, m'sieu, that a girl with millions, a girl who mingles in society, who has savoir-faire, should be at heart so naive, so romantic. It is American.

none the less.

"I take her, m'sieu, to the finest restaurants in Paris. We go to L'Escargot, to Montagné — ah, his *turbot à l'Asturienne* — to Dagnino for partridge — to L'Ane Rouge for *paté de venaison*. I order for her dishes and wines such as only the fortunate ever taste — and I pay for them, m'sieu, for I am not a gigolo.

"In all other respects Caroline is charming — amiable, pretty, chic, gay, romantic, not too intelligent. But in the matter of food, she is without taste. She eats sparingly, and advocates constantly a diet of greens, criticizing me because of my healthy appetite; she knows nothing of wines — in a word, she is a barbarian. Once, at Ramponneau's, I am about to order for her the famous eel stew of the house, to be followed by a cassoulet of baked white beans and preserved goose. Would you believe it? She prefers instead a lamb chop, with spinach.

"A sensible man does not, however, look for perfection in woman. I figure to myself that one can, in time, educate Caroline, and that if she chooses to starve herself, I at any rate need not. So I say nothing.

"I have said she was romantic. This is true. Thus, the narrow attitude of her friends and especially of Bill with regard to me, makes her all the more anxious for my company. Her head was filled with a thousand stories of love which triumphs over all obstacles, and ends with the lovers

"Well, then, one day I feel that the great moment has come. We are driving near St. Cloud, after lunch at the Pavillon du Château, consisting of *aspic de foie gras*, *Langouste à la Parisienne*, *poulet Grand'mère*, excellent wines, and *bombe glacée Archiduc*, of which the outside is vanilla and the interior *crème pralinée*. I ask Caroline to marry me. And she — m'sieu, she accepts me. She loves me.

"I am transported. We agree to keep the engagement secret, to marry in a month, secretly, to announce the marriage as an accomplished fact. Because this course is romantic, it appeals to Caroline.

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"More, she wishes to live for a while, at least, in France. To begin, I suggest merely a château that I know in Touraine, and an apartment in Passy; I wish to live modestly, I tell her, since her money must support us. But no, this does not satisfy her. She has a better idea, she says, but what, she will not tell me. It is a secret, a surprise. I know only that she employs an agent to find us a suitable home.

"Well, we obtain, quietly, a license. And at last, two days before the ceremony, her surprise is complete. We drive in her car to the little village of Vernon, on the road to Rouen. On the way, I beat my brains, asking myself what château, what great house is in Vernon? M'sieu, prepare to be astounded, as I was. She drove me, not to a château, not even to a villa, but to a very small, white cottage with a garden — a cottage, m'sieu, very pretty, very clean — but of five rooms only, with a few hectares of land.

"I think at first that she jests. But no! This is what happens, m'sieu, when young girls read too many romances. She would live her dream of a vine-covered cottage, never considering me.

"However, I was wise. I said to myself, 'No, Lucien, do not protest. After all, you can endure it for a while.' So I exclaimed with pleasure; I complimented her; and she was happy.

"Then, m'sieu, while we inspected the kitchen, I had a thought. I said to her, 'Tell me, my angel, where will the cook sleep? I do not see a bedroom for her.' 'The cook?' she said, surprised. 'But we do not want servants in the house, Lucien. I have arranged for an old woman to come in each day to clean. For the rest, I shall do everything myself.'

"'But the cuisine?' I said, incredulous. 'Surely you do not intend to cook, to soil those lovely hands, my adorable little cabbage?'

"She said, petulantly, 'But, of course, I do. I have always said that I would not have servants during the first year of my marriage. I want to be alone with you, Lucien. Don't you see, dear? Just you and I — alone.'

"M'sieu, I was stunned. I said, seriously now, 'But you cannot cook, Caroline.' She answered, laughing happily, 'Oh, yes, I can. At school I took purposely a course in domestic science. Let me show you, Lucien.'

"It seems, m'sieu, that the larder was full, in expectation of the moment when Caroline would reveal to me this, her surprise. Nothing would satisfy her but that she prepare a little lunch for me. I shrugged, I consented. I thought, 'Who knows? Perhaps she has a talent.' She went to work, m'sieu, in a pretty little apron trimmed with lace. An hour later she brought me a dish of eggs, somewhat scorched, tasteless and dry, resembling, she fondly believed, an omelette. Suppressing my groans, m'sieu, I took a bite, crunching between my teeth some small pieces of egg-shell.

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Meanwhile, she hovered over me, licking a finger that she had burned, and proudly awaiting my praise.

"What could I do, m'sieu? Tell her the truth? I was fond of her; I did not want to wound her. No, trusting to my resource to arrange matters afterward, I told her the omelette was delicious, and she kissed me. Then, suffering the tortures of the Inquisition, I finished that omelette.

"*Hélas!* That's life. I would have done better to throw it at her. She was convinced now that she was an accomplished cook. And she had a streak of stubbornness, Caroline. Her plan was complete. She said she did not wish to be like other girls of wealth, interested only in gaiety and clothes, with a husband good only for polo and other women. No, we would have the pleasures of the simple life. She would buy the adjoining farms and I would become what she called a gentleman farmer — some American madness, I do not know. Each day after my toil with the peasants I would return to eat the food which she had prepared with loving hands. At first, tactfully, I tried to dissuade her from her purpose. I told her than I on my part would do as she desired; but she must not overheat her delicate complexion by such work. She replied that she would do only light cooking, since she thought I should not eat so heavily. I became desperate. I urged her, pleaded with her, pointing out the folly of cooking oneself when one could hire excellent cooks for a few francs. She became indignant, now. She accused me of being unromantic, which, in her eyes, was the greatest crime. She said that her heart was set on a year's honeymoon, and that she would not alter this dream of her life, of us two alone in a vine-covered cottage, not for the world.

"Nothing had the smallest effect. And then, when my entreaties had failed, we quarreled, bitterly, for this omelette weighing on my stomach made me irritable.

"I was overwhelmed. I saw, m'sieu, a year of purgatory before I could attain paradise. It was bad enough that I must sweat among the peasants — I, Ganneron de Lavardin — but must I eat this notion of cookery which Caroline had learned in an American school for the daughters of the rich? Could such a marriage survive even long enough to insure a satisfactory settlement? Could I myself survive? These were the questions in my mind."

At this climax of the Count's narrative a little accident occurred. He made one of his melodramatic gestures, sweeping his hand across the table, and knocked a wine glass, in which a few drops of white wine still remained, into my lap. He sprang up with a hundred apologies, and in spite of my protests, insisted on coming around the table and helping to wipe away the wine from my coat and vest. I finally convinced him that no damage had been done, and, still murmuring self-reproaches, he resumed his chair.

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"Where was I? Oh, yes, m'sieu, I was torn. To obtain a fortune, was it worth while to cripple permanently one's intestinal tract?

"Sadly I made my resolution. I said to Caroline, 'You are resolved?' She said, 'Yes, Lucien, I am.' 'Then, my love,' I said to her, 'it is clear to me that we are not after all intended for each other. On these conditions which you have named, no Frenchman worthy of his race would marry you. No, no, Caroline, deeply as I adore you, I renounce you. Marry instead that fellow Bill, my angel; he no doubt has also the American stomach.'

"Why continue, m'sieu? She broke into tears; we parted; and a month later I read in the newspaper that she married this Bill, as I advised.

"Well, I have never regretted it. When I think that I, a Ganneron de Lavardin, almost sold my birthright as an epicure for a bag of gold — when I think of that omelette — I shudder. And in addition, I have the satisfaction of knowing that I have restored to America a fortune which, if I had spoken a word, would have remained in France. Yes, m'sieu, I alone, of my countrymen, have repaid — as a member of the old aristocracy should — a part of the debt of France to your great nation."

As the Count concluded his story, he glanced at his watch, and without waiting for my sincere expression of enjoyment, rose to his feet. "Ah, I am sorry," he said, "but I have a pressing engagement. I must hurry. Adieu, m'sieu," he added. "It has been a great pleasure to talk with you. Americans — they always fascinate me." He called to François who stood in a distant corner. "Tell madame I could not wait. And don't forget — Auteuil — the fourth race — Fortunatus."

"Thank you, m'sieu," numbled François. The Count flashed a charming smile at me, and hurried out. A moment later I heard the noise of his starter, and saw him disappear down the road in a little Citroën.

Amused, I poured the remainder of a bottle of excellent Montrachet into my glass, drank it, and beckoned to François. "The bill," I said. He handed it to me. I reached into my pocket. It was then that I discovered the absence of my wallet, which contained all my money.

I had scarcely linked the fact with its cause; I had hardly time to feel dismayed, when the door leading to the kitchen was flung violently open, and Mme. Hublet, crimson-faced, furious, rushed out. In her hand she carried a pot which gave off an atrocious smell, and she was crying. "Where is he, that liar, that thief? I'll give him his Sauce Zimmermann! I'll make him drink it, every drop, this poison! I'll teach him what it is to pay in kind! Where is he?"

No one answered her. As I was mustering my forces for the imminent ordeal, I saw François, the waiter, take a card out of his pocket and slowly, with a dismal shrug, in the manner of one who should have known better, tear it into small pieces.

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THE INVESTIGATIONS OF INSPECTOR APPLEBY

OGNE '54

by MICHAEL INNES

MR. HILDEBERT BRAUNKOPF, PROprietor of the Da Vinci Gallery, was in despair. "Three pictures, my goot Sir John Abbleby — three most puttikler voonderble pictures stolen in the deeps of the night! Three *chef-d'oeuvre* masterpieces of this very sad great painter, Robin Pacello. What losses, Sir John, what dogostrophes for the worlt of art."

"No doubt." Inspector Appleby was glancing round the little exhibition. There were certainly three gaping frames. "I suppose this Robin Pacello is dead? I seem to remember that posthumous exhibitions are your particular line."

Braunkopf nodded — but with the air of one modestly disclaiming some enthusiastic tribute to the beauty of his conduct. "It is the widows, Sir John — the widows and chiltrens and unmarried mummies of these young so sad dead painters. Always I think of them, Sir John, when I arrange these most puttikler reputable well-known memorial exhibitings — yes? Is it not so?"

"Quite so." Appleby had walked up to one of the empty frames. "Unglazed, I see. And the fellow has simply taken a razor and cut the canvas from its stretcher. The others are the same?" He eyed the frame.

"Just the same. Three precisely similitudinous irreplaceable losses to our voonderble modern art." Mr. Braunkopf's deep esthetic dejection lightened for a moment. "But at least we have the frames, Sir John — no?"

"You have the frames because, when cut out, the canvases could be rolled and carried away unobtrusively." Appleby took another prowl round the gallery. "Were these valuable Pacellos?"

"Valuable, Sir John?" Mr. Braunkopf appeared pained by the raw commercialism of this. "All these great Pacellos is nonvaluable — absolutely nonvaluable and beyond price." Mr. Braunkopf paused. "Thirty guineas," he added.

"You were asking thirty guineas for each? This young Pacello has hardly been heard of." Appleby had taken one of the empty frames from the wall. "What would you have accepted?"

"Ten." Mr. Braunkopf spoke without hesitation. He seemed to feel that the moment for some professional frankness, between himself and Appleby, had come.

"And what would the thief hope to get? Five?"

Mr. Braunkopf shook his head. "I

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don't see the possibles, Sir John, of his getting anything at all."

"That would be my guess, too." Appleby frowned. "And yet you have two or three quite good things in the next room."

"Yes indeeds, Sir John, Kokoschka, Chagall, one small Matisse. And this thief takes three mere nonesenses this young quite dead Pacello." Frankness was growing on Mr. Braunkopf. "It does not make senses — yes?"

"No, it does not. And the burglary, though not a skilled job, took a good deal of resolution." Appleby had already investigated this aspect of the matter. "Just get down the other two frames, will you? And then take the stretchers out of all three."

There was very little paint on any of the strips of canvas that had been masked by two of the frames. But under the third it was different. For some reason Pacello had decided to contract the area of his picture space, and he had achieved this by inserting a half-inch slip between frame and canvas. The thief had thus been obliged to leave behind him a narrow rim of paint. A very speculative reconstruction suggested some sort of seascape, and at the bottom a close inspection revealed a fragmentary inscription in dark red pigment:

ogne '54

The catalogue, when consulted, provided somewhat enigmatic information. The painting had been entitled *The Exile*. Appleby appealed to the Da Vinci's proprietor. But Mr. Braunkopf's memory was reprehensibly vague. It was only after some thought that he recalled the exile to have been a woman.

"What sort of woman, Mr. Braunkopf? Young or old? And why do you think Pacello was interested in her?"

"Not yunk, Sir John, and not very old neithers. But fenestrated. That was what interested Pacello."

"Fenestrated?" This was clearly a more than common flight of Braunkopf's English.

"Yes, Sir John. Fenestrated and boffled."

"I see." Light had come to Appleby. Pacello's subject had seemed frustrated and baffled. It was a reasonable appearance for an exile to bear. Seeing at least a tenuous line of investigation before him, Appleby departed, leaving Mr. Braunkopf in his rifled halls.

Pacello had been a lonely young painter, without interested relatives or intimate friends. Nobody except the ingeniously predatory owner of the Da Vinci — who could in this case scarcely have been solicitous for widow, wife, or unmarried mother — had descended upon his remains. And although the instruments of his art had vanished — probably having been more readily saleable than his canvasses — a considerable quantity of junk had simply been pitched into an attic next to the studio in which he had painted.

Appleby worked through this. It was a melancholy task. There was a

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series of sketch books, some much thumbed and battered, and some from which pages had been ripped out here and there — perhaps in impatience or despair. Appleby found himself with the impression that Pacello had worked a slender talent very hard, and that nobody had cared a damn. One of the sketch books Appleby studied with particular attention. It was newer than the others. And pencilled on the cover was the description: *Boulogne, Spring '54.*

The contents were entirely miscellaneous. There were studies of the sea, of clouds, of ingeniously ugly buildings. There were one or two figure studies and several portraits. It was at one of the last that Appleby paused. He was looking at what was far and away the best painting by Pacello he had yet seen: the head and shoulders of a woman, with some suggestion of a balustrade upon which she was leaning to gaze at the sea. It was no more than an extremely rapid sketch, and there was no suggestion that the subject had posed, or even been aware of what was happening. Nevertheless, Pacello had achieved something vividly individual and universally moving. At the foot of the page he had scrawled the words *lonely woman.* Then he had struck these out and written *the exile* instead.

Appleby looked at this for a long time. Then he put the sketch book in his pocket and turned to leave. Suddenly he stiffened. The building in which he had found Pacello's studio was at present unoccupied, and he had experienced some difficulty in getting the key. But now somebody was coming cautiously up the attic stairs.

"Good afternoon." Executing an old professional maneuver, Appleby stepped from behind the door and smartly closed it. "Did you suppose you were in luck, and the house unlocked? On the contrary, you're not in luck. I'm from Scotland Yard. The game's up."

This headlong onslaught had its effect. The elderly man who had

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crept into the attic gave a weak cry. "I don't understand you," he managed to say. "I have simply come to look —"

"I think for this." Appleby drew out the sketch book. "You got away with the painting, and with two others to obscure what you were about. And then, knowing something of artists' methods, you realized there would probably be a sketch among Pacello's abandoned effects. So here you are. And here" — Appleby thrust forward the drawing of the woman — "is . . . would it be your wife?"

The man nodded. "Yes," he whispered. "You've got us."

"Your wife, banished for some reason to Boulogne, was sketched by Pacello without her knowing it. When Pacello died, the painting he made from this sketch was publicly exhibited, bearing the date 1954. And this must have been disastrous for you. Why?" Appleby paused. "Have you been conspiring with your wife to suggest that she is dead?" He paused again and received a feeble nod. "An insurance fraud?"

"We've done nothing about that yet!" The elderly man's voice was desperate. "We made it look like drowning — two years ago. But it was held doubtful, and we were scared. It might be another two years before death was legally presumed. She went to Boulogne. It seems to be an eternity ago. And she's there still. But if anybody had recognized that portrait and noticed the date —"

"You would both be prosecuted?"

"I suppose so. But — I tell you — I haven't received a penny! I haven't even made a claim on the company! Or only what you might call a provisional notice that —" The elderly man's voice trailed away. He was mumbling incoherently. "Great temptation . . . sudden idea . . . wonderful plan . . . led into it . . . against my better judgment . . . and it didn't even work."

"No." Appleby shook his head. "Those wonderful plans seldom do."

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **PATRICIA HIGHSMITH**

TITLE: ***The Perfect Alibi***

TYPE: Crime-Detective Story

LOCALE: New York City

COMMENTS: *Mary vacillated between continuing to see Howard and breaking off their relationship — all because of George who seemed to have a sort of hypnotic power over her. Until Howard could no longer stand it . . . By the author of* THE TALENTED MR. RIPLEY.

THE CROWD CREPT LIKE A SIGHTless, mindless monster toward the subway entrance. Feet slid forward a few inches, stopped, slid forward again. Howard hated crowds. They made him panicky. His finger was on the trigger, and for a few seconds he concentrated on not letting himself pull it, which he had an almost uncontrollable impulse to do.

He had ripped open the bottom of his overcoat pocket, and he now held the gun in that pocket in his gloved hand. George's broad, short back was less than two feet in front of him, but there were a couple of people in between. Howard turned his shoulders and squeezed through the space between a man and a woman, jostling the man slightly.

Now he was right behind George, the front of his unbuttoned overcoat brushing the back of George's coat. Howard leveled the gun in his pocket. A woman bumped against his right arm, but he kept his aim steady at the small of George's back, kept his eyes straight ahead over George's felt hat. A wisp of George's cigar smoke came to Howard's nostrils, familiar and nauseating. The subway entrance was only a couple of yards away. *Within the next five seconds,* Howard told himself, and at the same time his left hand moved to push the right side of his overcoat back, made an incomplete movement, and a split second later the gun fired.

A woman shrieked.

Howard dropped the gun through the open pocket.

The crowd had recoiled from the

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gun's explosion, sweeping Howard back with them. A few people lurched in front of him, but for an instant he saw George in a little clear spot on the sidewalk, lying on his side, the thin, half-smoked cigar still gripped in his teeth which Howard saw bared, then covered by his relaxing mouth.

"He's shot!" someone screamed.

"Who?"

"Where?"

The the crowd surged forward with a roar of curiosity and Howard was carried almost to where George was sprawled.

"Stand back! You'll trample on him!" a man's voice shouted.

Howard sidled free of the crowd and went down the subway steps. The roar of voices on the sidewalk was replaced suddenly by the droning roar of an incoming train. Howard mechanically got out some change and bought a token. No one around him seemed aware that a dead man was lying at the top of the stairs. Couldn't he use another exit and go up and get his car? He had parked his car hastily on Thirty-fifth Street, near Broadway. No, he just might run into someone who had seen him near George in the crowd. Howard was very tall. He felt conspicuous. He could pick up the car a little later. He looked at his watch. Exactly 5:54.

He crossed the station and got on an uptown train. His ears were sensitive to noise, and ordinarily the subway screech of steel on steel was an intolerable torture to him; but now, as he stood holding on to a strap, he was oblivious of the din and grateful for the unconcern of the newspaper-reading passengers around him. His right hand, still in his overcoat pocket, groped automatically for the bottom of the pocket. He must sew that up tonight, he reminded himself. He glanced down at the front of his coat and saw with a shock, almost like a pain, that the bullet had made a hole in the coat. Quickly he pulled out his right hand and placed it over the hole, all the while staring at the advertisement placard in front of him.

He frowned intently, going over the whole thing again, trying to see if he had made a mistake anywhere. He had left the store a little earlier than usual—at 5:15—in order to be at Thirty-fourth Street by 5:30, when George always left his shop. Mr. Luther, Howard's boss, had said, "Finished early today, eh, Howard?" But it had happened a few times before, and Mr. Luther wouldn't think anything about it. And he had wiped the gun inside and out, had even wiped the bullets. He had bought the gun about five weeks ago in Bennington, Vermont, and he had not had to give his name when he bought it. He had not been to Bennington before or since. He thought it was really impossible that the police could ever trace the gun. And nobody had seen him fire the shot—he was sure of that. He had

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glanced around before he went into the subway, and nobody had been looking at him.

Howard had meant to ride uptown for a few stations, then go back downtown and get his car; but now he thought he should dispose of the coat first. Too dangerous to try to get a hole like this rewoven. It didn't look like a cigarette burn—it looked just like what it was. He'd have to hurry. His car was within three blocks of where he had shot George. He'd be questioned tonight, probably, about George Frizell, because the police would certainly question Mary, and if she didn't mention his name, their landladies—hers and George's—would. George had so few friends.

He thought of pushing the coat into some wastepaper bin in a subway station. But too many people would notice that. In an ashcan on the street? That too seemed conspicuous—after all, it was a fairly new coat. No, he'd have to go home and get something to wrap it in before he could throw it away.

He got out at the Seventy-second Street station. He lived in a small ground-floor apartment in a brownstone building on West Seventy-first Street, near West End Avenue. Howard saw no one when he entered, which was good because he could say, if he were questioned about it, that he had come home at 5:30 or so instead of nearly 6:00. As soon as he entered his apartment and turned on the light, Howard knew what he would do with the coat: burn it in the fireplace. That was the safest thing to do.

He raked some change and a flattened pack of cigarettes out of the left pocket of the coat, took the coat off, and flung it on the sofa. Then he picked up his telephone and dialed Mary's number.

She answered on the third ring.

"Hello, Mary," he said. "Hello, darling. It's done."

A second's hesitation. "Done? *Really,* Howard? You're not—"

No, he wasn't joking. He didn't know what else to say to her, what else he dared say to her over the phone. "I love you. Take care of yourself, darling," he said, absently.

"Oh, Howard!" She was starting to cry.

"Mary, the police will probably talk to you. Maybe in just a few minutes." He squeezed the telephone, wanting to put his arms around her, to kiss her cheeks that would be wet with tears now. "Don't mention me, darling—just *don't,* whatever they ask you. I've got some things to do yet and I've got to hurry. If your landlady mentions me, don't worry about it, I can handle it—but don't you do it first. Understand?" He was aware that he was talking to her again as if she were a child, and that it wasn't good for her; but it wasn't the right time to be thinking of what was good for her and what wasn't. "Do you understand, Mary?"

"Yes," she said, her voice thin.

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"Don't be crying when the police come in, Mary. Wash your face. You've got to pull yourself—" He stopped. "Go out to a movie, honey. Will you? Go out now before the police come!"

"All right."

"Promise me!"

"All right."

He hung up and strode to the fireplace. He crumpled some newspaper, laid some kindling across it, and struck a match. He was glad now that he had bought a supply of wood and kindling for Mary, glad that Mary liked fires, because he'd lived here for months before he met Mary and never thought of having a fire.

Mary lived directly across from George, on West Eighteenth Street. The police would logically go to George's house the first thing and question his landlady—because George had lived alone and there'd be nobody else there to question. George's landlady—Howard remembered his few glimpses of her as she leaned out the window last summer, thin, gray-haired, prying with a hideous intensity into what everybody in her house was doing . . . undoubtedly she would tell the police that there was a girl across the street whom Mr. Frizell spent a lot of time with. Howard only hoped that the landlady wouldn't mention him right off, because she was bound to have guessed that the young man with the car who came to see Mary so often was her boy friend, bound to have suspected a jealousy between him and George. But maybe she wouldn't mention him. And maybe Mary would be out of the house by the time the police came.

For a moment he paused, tensely, in the act of putting more wood on the fire. He was trying to imagine exactly what Mary was feeling now, having just learned that George Frizell was dead. He was trying to feel it himself, so that he could predict her behavior, so that he would be better able to comfort her. *Comfort her!* He had freed her of a monster! She ought to be rejoicing. But he knew she would be shattered at first. She had known George since she was a child. George had been her father's best friend—but how differently George must have behaved with another man, Howard could guess; and when her father had died, George, a bachelor, had taken Mary over as if he had been her father. But with the difference that he controlled every move she made, convinced her that she couldn't do a thing without him, convinced her that she shouldn't marry anybody he disapproved of. Which was everybody. Howard, for instance. Mary had told him that there had been two other young men whom George had thrust out of her life.

But Howard hadn't been thrust out. He hadn't fallen for George's lies about Mary's being sick, Mary's being too tired to go out or to see

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anybody. George had actually called him up several times and tried to break their dates—but he had gone down to her house and gotten her, many evenings, in spite of her terror of George's anger. Mary was twenty-three, but George had kept her a child. Mary had to have George along even to buy a new dress. Howard had never seen anything like it in his life. It was like a bad dream, or something in a fantastic story that was too incredible to believe. Howard had supposed that George was in love with her in some strange way, and he had asked Mary about this shortly after he had met her, and she had said, "Oh, no! Why he never even touches me!" And it was quite true that George never even touched her. Once, while they were saying goodbye, George had bumped her shoulder and had jumped back as if he had been burned, saying, "Excuse me!" It was very strange.

Yet it was as if George had locked Mary's mind away somehow—like a prisoner of his own mind, as if she had no mind of her own. Howard couldn't put it into words. Mary had soft, dark eyes that looked tragically, hopelessly sad, and it made him fighting mad to look at them sometimes, mad enough to fight back at the person who had done that to her. The person was George Frizell. Howard could never forget the look George had given him when Mary had introduced them, a superior, smiling, knowing look that had seemed to say, "You can try. I know what you're trying. But you won't get very far."

George Frizell had been a short, swarthy man with a heavy jaw and heavy black eyebrows. He had a little shop on West Thirty-sixth Street where he specialized in chair repairs, but it seemed to Howard that he had had no other interest in life but Mary. When he was with her, he concentrated on her alone, as if he were exerting some hypnotic power over her, and Mary behaved as if she were hypnotized. She wasn't herself around George. She was always looking at him, looking back over her shoulder at him to see if he approved of whatever she was doing, even if it were only getting some chops out of the oven.

Mary loved George and hated him at the same time. Howard had been able to make her hate George—up to a point, and then she would suddenly start defending him again. "But George was so kind to me after my father died, when I was all alone, Howard," Mary would protest. And so they had drifted for almost a year, Howard trying to outmaneuver George and see Mary a few times a week, Mary vacillating between continuing to see him and breaking it off because she felt she was hurting him too much. "I want to marry you!" Howard had said a dozen times when Mary had gone into her agonized fits of self-condemnation. He'd never been able to make her understand that he would

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go through anything for her. "I love you, too, Howard," Mary had said many times, but always with a tragic sadness that was like the sadness of a prisoner who cannot find a way to escape. But there had been a way to free her, a violent and final way. Howard had taken it . . .

He was on his knees in front of the fireplace now, trying to tear the coat into sections small enough to burn. He found the tweed extremely difficult to cut, and the seams almost equally difficult to tear. He tried burning it without cutting it up, starting at a bottom corner, but the flames crawled up the nap of the tweed toward his hands, while the material itself seemed as resistant to the fire as asbestos. He'd have to cut it up in small pieces, he realized. And the fire would have to be bigger and hotter.

Howard put more wood on. It was a mean little fireplace with a bellied-out iron grate and not much of a recess, so that the pieces of wood he had put on stuck out in front over the rim of the grate. He attacked the coat again with the scissors. It took him minutes simply to remove a sleeve. He opened a window to get some of the smell of burning cloth out of the room.

The whole coat took him nearly an hour because he couldn't put much on at a time without smothering the fire. He watched the last piece beginning to smoke in the center, watched the flames break through and lick a widening circle. He was thinking of Mary, seeing her white, fear-stricken face when the police arrived, when they told her for the second time about George's death. He was trying to imagine the worst—that the police had arrived just after he had spoken to her and that she had made some blunder, revealed to the police that she already knew about George's death, yet was not able to say who had told her; he imagined that in her hysteria she had blurted out his name, Howard Quinn, as the man who might have done it.

Howard moistened his lips, terrified suddenly by the realization that he couldn't depend on Mary. She loved him—he was sure of that—but Mary couldn't depend on herself.

For one wild, unthinking instant, Howard wanted to rush down to West Eighteenth Street to be with her when the police arrived. He saw himself defiantly facing the police, his arm around Mary's shoulders, answering every question, parrying every suspicion. But that was insane. The mere fact that they would be there in her apartment together—

He heard a knock at his door. A moment before, he had been aware that some people had come in the front door, but he had not thought that they were coming to see him. Suddenly he was trembling.

"Who is it?" he asked.

"The police. We're looking for Howard Quinn. Is this apartment One A?"

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Howard glanced at the fire. The coat was all burned, nothing but glowing wisps left of the last piece. And they wouldn't be interested in the coat, he thought. They had only come to question him, just as they had questioned Mary. He opened the door and said, "I'm Howard Quinn."

There were two policemen, one quite a bit taller than the other. They came into the room. Howard saw them both glance at the fireplace. The smell of burned cloth was still in the room.

"I suppose you know why we're here," said the taller officer. "You're wanted down at the station. You'd better come with us now." He looked at Howard. It was not a friendly look.

For a moment Howard thought he was going to faint. Mary must have told them everything, he thought, everything.

"All right," he said.

The shorter officer was looking into the fireplace. "What've you been burning? Cloth?"

"Just a few old—a few old clothes," Howard said.

The policemen exchanged a glance, a kind of amused glance, and said nothing. They were so sure of his guilt, Howard thought, that they didn't need to ask any questions. They had guessed he had burned his overcoat and why he had burnt it. Howard got his trenchcoat from the closet and put it on.

They walked out of the house and down the front steps to a Police Department car parked at the curb.

Howard wondered what was happening to Mary now? She hadn't meant to betray him, he was sure. Maybe it had been an accidental slip that the police had caught and questioned her about until she had broken down. Or maybe she had been so upset when they arrived that she had told them before she knew what she was doing. Howard cursed himself for not having taken more precautions about Mary, for not having sent her out of town. He had told Mary last night that he was going to do it today, just so it *wouldn't* come as a shock to her. How stupid he had been! How little he really understood her after all his efforts to understand! How much better if he had killed George and said nothing at all to her!

The car stopped and they got out. Howard had paid no attention to where they had been driving, and he did not try to see now. There was a big building in front of him, and he walked through the doorway with the two officers and then into a room that resembled a small courtroom where a police officer sat at a high desk, like a judge.

"Howard Quinn," one of the policemen announced.

The officer at the high desk looked down at him with interest. "Howard Quinn. The young man in a terrible hurry," he said with a sarcastic smile. "You're the Howard Quinn who knows Mary Purvis?"

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"Yes."

"And George Frizell?"

"Yes," Howard murmured.

"I thought so. Your address tallies. I've just been talking to the homicide boys. They want to ask you some questions. You seem to be in trouble there, too. It's a busy evening for you, isn't it?"

Howard didn't quite understand. He looked around the room for Mary. There were two other policemen sitting on a bench against the wall and a man in a shabby suit dozing on another bench; but Mary was not in the room.

"Do you know why you're here tonight, Mr. Quinn?" the officer asked him in a hostile tone.

"Yes." Howard stared down at the base of the high desk. He felt that something within him was collapsing—a framework that had held him upright for the past several hours, but which had been imaginary all the time—his feeling that he had had a duty to perform in killing George Frizell, that he had been liberating the girl he loved and who loved him, that he had been ridding the world of an evil, hideous monster of a man. Now under the cold, professional eyes of the three policemen, Howard could see what he had done as they saw it—as the taking of a human life, nothing else. And the girl he had done it for had betrayed him! Whether Mary had wanted to or not, she had betrayed him. Howard covered his eyes with his hand.

"I can imagine you were upset by the murder of someone you knew, Mr. Quinn, but at a quarter to six you didn't know anything about that—or did you, by any chance? Was that why you were in such a hurry to get home or wherever you were going?"

Howard tried to figure out what the officer meant. His brain seemed paralyzed. He knew he had shot George at almost exactly 5:43. Was the officer still being sarcastic? Howard looked at him. He was a man of about forty with a chubby, alert face. His eyes were contemptuous.

"He was burning some clothes in his fireplace when we walked in on him, Captain," said the shorter policeman who was standing near Howard.

"Oh?" said the Captain. "*Why* were you burning clothes?"

He knew very well, Howard thought. He knew what he had burned and why, just as the two police officers knew.

"Whose clothes were you burning?" the Captain asked.

Howard still said nothing. The ironic questions infuriated him and shamed him at the same time.

"Mr. Quinn," the Captain said in a louder tone, "at a quarter to six this evening you knocked a man down in your car at the corner of Eighth Avenue and Sixty-eighth Street and drove on. Isn't that correct?"

Howard looked up at him, uncomprehending.

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"You were aware that you hit him, were you not?" the Captain asked more loudly.

He was here for something else, Howard realized. Hit-and-run driving! "I—I don't—"

"Your victim isn't dead, if that'll make you more able to talk. But it's not your fault. He's in the hospital with a broken leg—an old man who can't afford a hospital." The Captain scowled down at him. "I think you ought to be taken to see him. I think it would be good for you. You've committed one of the most shameful crimes a man can be guilty of—hit-and-run driving. If not for one woman who was quick enough to get your license number, we'd never have caught you."

Howard suddenly understood. The woman had made a mistake, maybe a mistake of only one figure in his license number—but it gave him an alibi. If he didn't take it, he was lost. There was too much against him, even if Mary had said nothing—the fact that he had left the store earlier than usual today, the hellish coincidence of the police walking in just as he was burning the coat. Howard looked up at the Captain's angry face. "I'm willing to go see the man," he said contritely.

"Take him to the hospital," the Captain said to the two policemen. "By the time you get back, the homicide boys'll be here. And incidentally, Mr. Quinn, you're being held on five thousand dollars' bail. If you don't want to spend the night here, you'd better get it. Do you want to try to raise it tonight?"

Mr. Luther, his boss, could get it for him tonight, Howard thought. "May I make a phone call?"

The Captain gestured toward a telephone on a table against the wall.

Howard looked up Mr. Luther's home number in the directory on the table and dialed it. Mrs. Luther answered. Howard knew her slightly, but without any polite exchanges, he asked if he could speak to Mr. Luther. "Hello, Mr. Luther," he said. "I'd like to ask you a favor. I've had a bad accident. I need five thousand dollars for my bail . . . No, I'm not hurt, but—could you write a check for me and send it over by a messenger?"

"I'll bring the check myself," Mr. Luther said. "Just sit tight. I'll get the company lawyer on it, if you need help. Don't take any lawyer they offer you, Howard. We've got Lyles, you know."

Howard thanked him. Mr. Luther's loyalty embarrassed him. Howard asked a police officer who was standing near him the address of the station, and gave it to Mr. Luther. Then he hung up and walked out with the two policemen who had been waiting for him.

They drove to a hospital in the West Seventies. One of the policemen inquired at the downstairs desk where Louis Rosasco was, and then they went up in an elevator.

The man was in a room by himself, propped up in bed with one

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leg in a cast that was suspended by cords from the ceiling. He was a gray man of about sixty-five or seventy with a long, seamed face and dark, deep-set eyes that looked extremely weary.

"Mr. Rosasco," said the taller police officer, "this is Howard Quinn, the man who knocked you down."

Mr. Rosasco nodded without much interest, though he kept his eyes on Howard.

"I'm very sorry," Howard said awkwardly. "I'll be glad to pay any bills you have, you can be sure of that." His car insurance would take care of the hospital bill, Howard thought. Then there'd be the matter of the court fine—at least a thousand dollars by the time he got through, but he'd manage it with some loans.

The man on the bed still said nothing to him. He looked groggy with sedatives.

The officer who had introduced them seemed dissatisfied because they had nothing else to say to each other. "Do you recognize the man, Mr. Rosasco?"

Mr. Rosasco shook his head. "I didn't see the driver. All I saw was a big black car coming down at me," he said slowly. "Hit the side of my leg—"

Howard set his teeth, waiting. His car was green, a light green. And it was not particularly big.

"It was a green car, Mr. Rosasco," the shorter policeman said, smiling. He was checking with a small yellow card he had taken from his pocket. "A green Pontiac sedan. You made a mistake."

"No, it was a black car," Mr. Rosasco said positively.

"Nope. Your car's green, isn't it, Quinn?"

Howard nodded once, stiffly.

"It was getting dark around six. You probably couldn't see very well," the cheerful officer said to Mr. Rosasco.

Howard watched Mr. Rosasco, holding his breath. For a moment Mr. Rosasco stared at the policemen, frowning, puzzled, and then his head fell back on the pillow. He was going to let it go. Howard relaxed a little.

"Guess you'd better get some sleep, Mr. Rosasco," the shorter officer said. "Don't worry about anything. Everything'll be taken care of."

The last thing Howard saw in the room was Mr. Rosasco's tired, rugged profile on the pillow, his eyes closed. The memory of his face stayed with Howard as he walked down the hall. His alibi . . .

When they got back to the station Mr. Luther had already arrived, and also a couple of men in civilian clothes—the men from homicide, Howard supposed. Mr. Luther came toward Howard, his round pink face troubled.

"What's this all about?" Mr. Luther asked. "Did you really hit somebody and drive on?"

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Howard nodded, shamefacedly. "I wasn't quite sure I hit him. I should have stopped—but I didn't."

Mr. Luther looked at him reproachfully, but he was going to remain loyal, Howard thought.

"Well, I've given them the check for your bail," Mr. Luther said.

"Thank you, sir."

One of the men in civilian clothes walked up to Howard. He was a slender man with sharp blue eyes in a thin face. "I have some questions to ask you, Mr. Quinn. You're acquainted with Mary Purvis and George Frizell?"

"Yes."

"May I ask where you were tonight at twenty minutes to six?"

"I was—I was driving uptown. I was driving from the store where I work at Fifty-third and Seventh Avenue to my apartment on Seventy-first Street."

"And you hit a man at a quarter to six?"

"I did," Howard said.

The detective nodded. "You know that George Frizell was shot this evening at exactly eighteen minutes of six?"

The detective suspected him, Howard thought. What had Mary told them? If he only knew . . . But the Captain of police had not specifically said that George Frizell had been shot. Howard drew his brows together hard. "No," he said.

"He was. We talked to your girl friend. She says you did it."

Howard's heart stopped for a moment. He stared into the detective's questioning eyes. "That's just not true."

The detective shrugged. "She's plenty hysterical. But she's plenty positive, too."

"It just isn't true! I left the store—I have to report to the store I work for around five. I drove—" His voice broke. It was Mary who was shattering him—Mary.

"You're Mary Purvis's boy friend, aren't you?"

"Yes," Howard replied. "I can't—she must be—"

"Did you want Frizell out of the way?"

"I didn't kill him. I had nothing to do with it! I didn't even know he was dead!" Howard babbled.

"Frizell saw Mary quite a lot, didn't he? That's what I heard from both landladies. Did you ever think they might be in love with each other?"

"No. Of course not."

"You weren't jealous of George Frizell?"

"Of course not."

The detective's arched eyebrows had not once come down. His whole face was like a question mark. "No?" he asked sarcastically.

"Listen, Shaw," the police captain said, stepping down from his desk. "We know where Quinn was at a quarter of six. He might know who did it, but he didn't do it himself."

"Do you know who did it, Mr. Quinn?" the detective asked.

"No, I don't."

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"Captain McCaffery tells me you were burning some clothes in your fireplace tonight. Were you burning a coat?"

Howard's head bobbed in a desperate nod. "I was burning a coat and a jacket, too. They were full of mothholes. I didn't want them in my closet any longer."

The detective put a foot on a straight chair and leaned closer to Howard. "It was a funny time to burn a coat, wasn't it? Just after you thought you might have knocked a man down in your car and maybe killed him? Whose coat were you burning? The murderer's? Maybe because there was a bullet hole in it?"

"No," Howard said.

"You didn't arrange with somebody to kill Frizell? Somebody who brought you his coat to get rid of?"

"No." Howard glanced at Mr. Luther, who was listening attentively. Howard stood up straighter.

"You didn't shoot Frizell, jump in your car, and rush home, knocking a man down on the way?"

"Shaw, that's impossible," Captain McCaffery put in. "We've got the exact times on this. You can't get from Thirty-fourth and Seventh to Sixty-eighth and Eighth in three minutes no matter how fast you drive! Face it!"

The detective kept his eyes on Howard. "Do you work for this man?" he asked, nodding toward Mr. Luther.

"Yes."

"What do you do?"

"I'm the Long Island salesman for William Luther Sporting Goods. I contact schools on Long Island and also place our goods in stores out there. I report to the Manhattan store at nine and at five." He recited it like a parrot. He felt weak in the knees. But his alibi was holding—like a stone wall.

"Okay," the detective said, taking his foot down from the chair and turning from Howard to the Captain. "We're still working on the case. It's still wide open for any news, any clues." He smiled at Howard, a cold smile of dismissal. Then he said, "By the way, have you ever seen this before?" He brought his hand out of his pocket with the little revolver from Bennington in his palm.

Howard frowned at it. "No, I haven't seen it before."

The man pocketed the gun. "We may want to talk to you again," he said with another faint smile.

Howard felt Mr. Luther's hand on his arm. They went out into the street.

"Who's George Frizell?" Mr. Luther asked.

Howard wet his lips. He felt very strange—as if he had just been hit over the head and his brain had gone numb. "A friend of a friend. A friend of a girl I know."

"And the girl? Mary Purvis, was it? Are you in love with her?"

Howard didn't answer. He looked down at the ground as he walked.

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"Is she the one who accused you?"

"Yes," Howard said.

Mr. Luther's grip tightened on his arm. "You look like you could stand a drink . . . Don't you want to go in?"

Howard saw that they were standing in front of a bar. He opened the door.

"She's probably very upset, you know," Mr. Luther said. "Women get like that. It was a friend of hers who was shot, wasn't it?"

Now it was Howard's tongue that was paralyzed, though his brain was spinning. He was thinking that he couldn't ever go back to work for Mr. Luther after this, that he couldn't trick a man like Mr. Luther. . . . Mr. Luther was talking on and on. Howard picked up the little jigger glass and drank half of it. Mr. Luther was telling him that Lyles would get him off as easily as he could possibly be got off.

"You've got to be more careful, Howard. You're impulsive, I've always known that. It has its good and bad sides, of course. But tonight—I have a feeling you knew you might have hit that man."

"I've got to make a phone call," Howard said. "Excuse me for a minute." He hurried to the booth at the back of the bar. He had to hear it from her. She had to be home. If she weren't home, he'd drop dead, right there in the phone booth. He'd explode.

"Hello." It was Mary's voice, dull and lifeless.

"Hello, Mary, it's me. You didn't—what did you say to the police?"

"I told them," Mary said slowly, "that you killed my friend."

"Mary!"

"I hate you."

"Mary, you don't mean that!" he cried out. But she did mean it and he knew it.

"I loved him and I needed him and you killed him," she said. "I hate you."

He clenched his teeth, letting the words echo in his brain. The police weren't going to get him. She couldn't do that to him, anyway. He hung up.

Then he was standing at the bar, and Mr. Luther's calm voice was going on as if it had never stopped while Howard telephoned.

"People have to pay, that's all," Mr. Luther was saying. "People have to pay for their mistakes and not make them again. . . . You know I think a lot of you, Howard. You'll live through this all right." A pause. "Did you just talk to Miss Purvis?"

"I couldn't reach her," Howard said.

Ten minutes later he had left Mr. Luther and was riding downtown in a taxi. He had told the driver to stop at Thirty-seventh and Seventh, so that in case he was being followed by the police, he could just walk on from there and keep clear of his car.

He got out at Thirty-seventh Street, paid the driver, and glanced around him. He saw no car that

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seemed to be trailing him. He walked in the direction of Thirty-fifth Street. The two straight ryes with Mr. Luther had braced him. He walked quickly, with his head up, and yet in a curious, frightening way he felt utterly lost. His green Pontiac was standing at the curb where he had left it. He got out his keys and opened the door.

He had a ticket—he saw it as soon as he sat down behind the wheel. He reached around and pulled it from under the windshield wiper. A parking ticket. A small matter, he thought, so small that he smiled. Driving homeward, it occurred to him that the police had made a very silly slip in not relieving him of his driving license when they had him at the station, and he began to laugh at this. The ticket lay beside him on the seat. It looked so petty, so innocuous compared to what he had been through, that he laughed at the ticket, too.

Then just as suddenly, his eyes filled with tears. The wound that Mary's words had made in him was still wide open, had not yet begun to hurt, he knew. And before it began to hurt, he tried to fortify himself. If Mary persisted in accusing him, he'd demand that she be examined by a psychiatrist. She wasn't completely sane, he'd always known that. He'd tried to get her to go to a psychiatrist about George, but she'd always refused. She didn't have a chance with her accusations, because he had an alibi—a perfect alibi. But if she *did* persist—

Mary had really encouraged him to kill George—he was sure of that now. She had really put the idea into his head with a thousand things she had hinted. *There's no way out, Howard; unless he dies.* So he had killed him—for *her*—and Mary had turned on him. But the police weren't going to get him.

There was a stretch of about fifteen feet of parking space near his apartment house, and Howard slid in next to the curb. He locked the car, then went into his house.

The smell of burned cloth still lingered in his apartment, and it struck him as odd, because he felt that so much time had passed. He scanned the parking ticket again in the better light.

He saw suddenly that his alibi was gone.

The ticket had been written at 5:45—exactly.

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **JOSEPH ZDERAD**

TITLE: ***Who Killed Cock Robin, Jr.?***

TYPE: Murder Puzzle

DETECTIVE: Boyd, Chief of Ornithological Investigations

LOCALE: Aviary, United States

COMMENTS: *An unusual and amusing novelty — murder in birdland, with all the characters (including the detectives, victim, suspects, and culprit) members of the feathered family . . . Take a perch in the 'tec tree and peep into The Nest.*

ALBERT "BERTIE" BOYD, CHIEF OF Ornithological Investigations, whistled for me. I swiftly hopped into his office. Any rookie would, especially one so fresh from the rookery as I am.

"Yes, sir?" I anxiously reported.

The chief stared at me with eagle eyes as he spoke. "Murder," he said. The single word dropped from his beak like a death sentence. "The Nest," he added. I knew the place well—a country club about three miles west as the crow flies. "Bring me the facts," ordered the chief.

"Right, Chief."

"*All* the facts."

"All the facts. Right. Yes, sir." I saluted, ran out, hopped into my coupe, and flew.

As I alighted, a few moments later, I heard the melancholy coo of mourning doves, tender and gentle. But I dared not pause. This was not a time for sentiment. I flew into The Nest.

My inspection was quick but thorough. Within two hours my report lay on Chief Boyd's desk, directly under his feet. It read: Arrived at The Nest during the cocktail hour. In a deeply shadowed hallway leading from the main lounge to a den, in a soft, pathetic heap, lay the still-warm corpse of Cock Robin, Jr., his neck broken by a severe blow. Beside him, and partially underneath his red breast, lay a broken martini glass, its contents spilled on the otherwise immaculate carpet.

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In the den were five male birds and two females. Each told the same story—an utterly simple one. They had mixed themselves drinks in the lounge and, in a group, went to the den to watch television. Only after they had been viewing for several minutes did they notice the absence of Robin, Jr. Mr. Robert, the manager, thinking Robin may have remained in the lounge, went to fetch him. Discovering the body in the hallway, he screamed, ran back into the den, and immediately notified the police. No one left The Nest after the discovery.

All seven birds disliked the late playboy Robin because of his cocky attitude, his insulting manner, and his constant bragging about the many firsts attributed to his family. No one mourned his death. Because of this mutual feeling and shared motive all seven birds were suspects. By questioning, I obtained the following information:

Mr. Robert, manager of The Nest and the adjoining golf course: tall, dark-haired, wears wide white suspenders. Bad habit: eats grain to the dislike of farmers.

Mr. Ember, literary gentleman: a heavy drinker, from Ash, Arizona.

Homer Sharpe, baseball player: as tall as Mr. Robert, black-haired, pleasant fellow, very flashy dresser. A strong believer in teamwork, he especially disliked Robin, Jr's. constant playing to the grandstand. Drinks moderately.

Flo Afton, chanteuse at The Nest: a charming singer with a vibrant, faraway, wild sound in her voice. Brown-haired, suntanned arms, wears a gown of white and yellow-spotted brown. Clutched her cocktail nervously all during questioning.

E. Allan, a linquist: a large, dark, shaggy-looking bird. Has had several run-ins with the law. A faithful husband, a teetotaler who keeps saying, "Don't touch the stuff. Nevermore for me."

Professor Icarus, inventor: working on a rocket to fly to the moon. A tall bird, dark heavy eyes, a colorful dresser—in fact, a glamor boy; has a slight lisp and chatters with a hissing wheeze.

Miss Dee, a flirt: came to The Nest to have a few drinks with Professor Icarus and Mr. Robert. Neatly dressed in black and white, plump yet delicate.

This completed my report. From it Chief Boyd not only solved the murder, but also identified each of the seven suspects. Can you?

(For correct solutions see page 117)

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **MELVILLE DAVISSON POST**

TITLE: ***No Way To Win***

TYPE: Legal Detective Story

DETECTIVE: Colonel Braxton

LOCALE: Old Virginia

COMMENTS: *Whenever an estate is willed to a survivor . . . well, look for trouble. Colonel Braxton, one of the literary forerunners of Perry Mason, was faced with a hopeless case; but that wily old lawyer knew how to deal even with "sharp disaster."*

IT WAS THE STRANGEST CASE THAT ever happened in Virginia.

It was strange in its unbelievable sequence of events, and strange in the character and motives of the men concerned in it.

In its result, also, it was a sort of miracle.

There was some element of the unusual in every feature. It seemed to move at no point in a normal manner, as though the whole affair ran counter to the natural order of events.

It was by chance that Colonel Braxton tried the case.

Young Pennington Carlisle, who should have conducted it, was drunk. The case was to come up that day in the circuit court before old Thorndike Byrd, and the judge was in an evil humor. He wished to close the term and return to Richmond.

And so Colonel Braxton was pitchforked into the case on the day of trial. The litigant, Miss Lesa Lewis, had come to him, in great extremity, and he had got up from the table in his office and gone to trial, with no preparation for it and with no chance to confer with counsel.

With the fame of Lesa Lewis's beauty I am not concerned here. But her fine distinguished courage is a feature of this memorable case and cannot be omitted. The judge's irritable manner could not frighten the girl. She braved him in the courtroom. She asked no favor; the case must go on.

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She would get a lawyer. And while the peppery old man disposed of motions, she looked up Mr. Dabney Mason.

Nor would she find fault with young Pennington Carlisle.

She had a broad and generous conception of the matter. The man loved her; he saw no way to win the case, and in the travail of it the vice of his distinguished family overcame him.

And, in fact, there was no way to win — no way that any man, familiar with the law, could see.

Mr. Dabney Mason, sitting near the judge's bench, could see no way. And he was an authority on such troubled matters.

There was, indeed, no case to try.

The whole matter was contracted to a single point. It was a point that no judge or jury ever could decide since the world began. And so the old English judges, cutting the Gordian knot, had laid down a rule. And the rule held. It had held in Virginia, following the English courts, and it would hold here.

And yet here was Colonel Braxton . . . With this eccentric lawyer anything could happen. And for that reason, when Miss Lesa Lewis had come to Mr. Dabney Mason to find an attorney for her, he had taken her at once to Colonel Braxton.

"Colonel," he said, when they had entered, "I bring you the loveliest client in Virginia, and the hardest case."

The lawyer bowed profoundly.

"It is a compliment in two ways," he answered, "and I thank you, Dabney."

Colonel Braxton sat now beside his client at one of the attorney's tables, within the railing that barred out the crowd. He was making a leisurely examination of the exhibits in this famous case: the two weapons with which the tragedy had been accomplished and the sheet of glass that the bullets had pierced and shattered.

It was a sheet of glass two feet in diameter, the top half of a door between the drawing-room and the library of the old Virginia house in which the tragedy had happened. It had been taken out of the frame of the door, and every shattered fragment carefully fixed in place and held by an additional sheet of glass glued tight against it with some transparent cement. The two weapons, a long-barreled pistol and a heavy revolver of an early pattern, also had been preserved intact, precisely as they had been found after the double tragedy.

These exhibits were on the table for the world to see — the attorneys, the judges, the jury, and the people with whom the house was crowded.

And these Virginia courtrooms were usually packed with people. The very architectural structure of them presumed this public interest in the administration of the law. Nearly the whole floor was occupied with seats for the people, as in a theater; then there was a railing, spindled like a stairway, across the room, and beyond this railing was the elevated bench for

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the judge, a desk for the clerk, tables for the attorneys and their clients, seats for the jury, and a chair for the witness to be examined. The space so taken up was a small part of the great room; in the larger portion of it the people sat.

Old Thorndike Byrd had seen no reason for a jury, but he had impaneled one, to save his record, if the case went up. He put it in merely for form; he expected to direct the verdict when the time arrived.

This was not Thorndike Byrd's judicial district; the presiding judge was ill, and Byrd had come from Richmond to try the case. The bar were not of his acquaintances or friends, and he was not concerned about their convenience.

Nor did the equities of the case concern him; nor to what absurd uses the estate went after his decision. The vagaries of old Peregrin Monroe, in his extraordinary testament, were neither here nor there. The testament had been carefully drawn and was a valid paper, for all its fool provisions. He would direct a verdict on the legal ruling, dismiss the case, adjourn the court, and set out for Richmond. He did not intend to be held here for a long-winded trial.

And he was right, from a judicial viewpoint.

He administered the law correctly, with an accurate concern for the exact letter of it, and no care beyond. The tragedies and absurdities of this case did not concern him. And they were tragedies and absurdities unequaled in any earlier case of record . . .

Old Peregrin Monroe, dying without children, had sent for his two nephews.

It was a family of bitter hatreds.

The devil was more welcome to old Peregrin than either of the two nephews. But the three were all that remained of the immediate family. And when the old man in his bed sent out the message, the two of them rode in. There was a great estate in lands to go in some direction. And so they came, in armed neutrality, hating each other, and stood on either side of the great four-poster bed. In stature, and for all the ten years of age between them, they were equal.

Old Peregrin was propped up among the pillows. He regarded them with an ironic smile.

"My dear nephews," he said, "ours is an affectionate family, and what we do among ourselves we do for love alone. Now, I cannot, for my life, determine which one of you two nephews is the dearer to me, and so I am obliged to leave the decision, on that point, to Heaven. I have provided in my testament that my estate, this manor house and lands and all my properties and monies, shall go after my death to whichever one of you two gentlemen shall survive the other, and in the event that neither shall survive the other, then it shall go to found a Negro colony in Massachusetts."

He stroked his long sardonic face

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with his big veined hand, and looked at the two scowling gentlemen standing one at each side of his great bed. There was a sort of malicious chuckle in his voice.

"I have taken great care to make it legal. I have paid a hundred eagles for that purpose, and have lodged the testament with Mr. Coleman Northcote, who is the only honest man I know. He, I think, can be trusted to carry out my will. I admit he tried to talk me into some other plan, but my innate love for my family prevailed against his argument, and he undertook finally to get my wishes into sound legal form. He said: 'Monroe, you have the instinct of the devil. Don't you see what this will lead to?'"

"I replied that the compliment was excessive. But I saw, I thought, what it would lead to. It would lead to a decision on a point that my evenly balanced affection could not make. Heaven would be asked to make a decision that my love rejected. It would lead to my estate descending to the better man."

He paused, and the demonic leer behind his eyes came out in a sort of triumph.

"We are not a long-lived race. We are peculiarly subjected to some sharp disaster. I have a feeling that something will happen quickly to decide which one of my two nephews is the better man." He laughed. "It will be as these newfangled scientists affirm—a survival of the fittest! . . . And now, my dear nephews, lest your grief for me be greater than you can bear, I dismiss you with my blessing."

And he waved them out.

Of course what old Peregrin Monroe foresaw occurred.

Neighbors and friends endeavored to effect a compromise. But the heirs of old Peregrin Monroe were in too deadly a hatred of each other to be turned aside.

There was no witness; but the events could be easily reconstructed. They each had a weapon, for they both went armed after old Peregrin Monroe died.

The tragedy occurred in the very manor house from which the ironic old man had been carried out.

The drawing-room opened into a library with a door half glass, and these two rooms opened into a central entrance hall. Each man had put his weapon on a table in each room, with a candle in a tall stick beside it. And, starting from the entrance hall, with their backs together, they had returned each to his weapon, and fired at each other through the door.

The door had been closed, either by inadvertence or by a gust of wind. No one knew. But it came about that it *was* closed when the two desperate actors in this tragedy fired at each other through the glass instead of the open doorway.

The two men were both dead when they were found.

One was lying on the floor, and one sat in a great chair beside his table, into which he had dropped when his opponent's bullet struck him.

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The candles had burned down to the sticks.

No one could tell if either had survived the other. The older one had been shot through the heart with a bullet from the big revolver, and could not have lived a moment, and the younger, in the chair by the library table, also had a bullet through the chest from his opponent's pistol.

Miss Lesa Lewis was the distant and sole heir of this younger nephew. Pennington Carlisle was her affianced husband. He was young, and in his enthusiasm had brought this suit.

He had no case that any calm legal head could see.

In all like catastrophies, cited in the law books, the presumption was that both parties died simultaneously . . . "perished together," as the decisions said.

This was the rule of law universally adopted by the courts — adopted and maintained after that leading case in which a noted judge, vexed like Solomon, said that he knew of no legal principle on which he could decide it.

But youthful hope can go far.

Young Pennington Carlisle had brought his suit, trusting to chance for enough evidence to get his case to a jury.

It would take very little — any scrap of evidence to indicate survivorship.

And once before a jury he was sure he would win. No jury in Virginia would take this estate from Miss Lesa Lewis and send it on old Peregrin Monroe's fool errand to Massachusetts. But there must be *some* indicatory evidence of survivorship, or the judge, following the legal rule, would direct a verdict against her . . . Mr. Dabney Mason, sitting before his docket, wondered what would happen . . . what could happen in so clear a case? But when he looked at Miss Lesa Lewis he prayed for a miracle. He had rarely, in his life, seen anything so lovely.

There was the glamor of gold about her, with no shine of any baser metal. Her heavy hair was of spun gold, her whole blonde self, fine and vital, radiated a splendid courage — a courage that no threatened disaster could bludgeon down.

She deserved to win, but his hope dwindled on the word. There was no way past old Thorndike Byrd and the rule of the law.

Mr. Dabney Mason turned toward Colonel Braxton.

The old lawyer sat relaxed, as if no longer concerned with the case. Having finished his careful scrutiny of the glass and weapons, he seemed without further interest in events, his face a mask behind which the spirit of the man dozed or moved, inscrutable.

The judge directed the clerk to enter Colonel Braxton for the plaintiff, and turned to the court.

"Gentlemen," he said, "this case is governed by a well-defined rule of law, and if neither side has any witness to call, I shall now direct a verdict."

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Mr. Coleman Northcote, representing the eccentric testator, shook his head, and Colonel Braxton answered: "I have no witness to call, Your Honor."

"Then I shall direct a verdict," the judge continued, "and the court can rise."

He looked up at the long clock on the wall, as though to conclude the term within the hour. But he was interrupted.

Colonel Braxton was on his feet.

"Your Honor," he said, his voice flat and droning, as with ennui, "while I have no witness to call, I do have some evidence to introduce."

The judge flung about.

"What sort of evidence?" His voice was a snarl. "The evidence of experts perhaps?" He snapped savagely on the word. "Experts! Bah! I wouldn't hang a dog on what such creatures swear to! For a dozen eagles they would prove Saint Paul was mad, and name the monomania. Experts! May the devil remove them out of courts, for they serve only to confuse the issue."

He thundered on — for this subject was his pet *bête noire* — oblivious to the fact that Colonel Braxton had said he would call no witness, and that even experts were witnesses one would be obliged to call.

"Shall I be held here to listen to such creatures, rambling on with their fingers between the pages of their books, in some prolix opinion? Opinion isn't evidence! I will not be held here to listen to opinion. If you have any evidence, present it, or stand aside while I direct a verdict."

The judge was, as I have said, in an evil humor. But, withal, he had an accurate conception of what such a case required to get it past the rule. He was a trial to his bar. But his head was clear on procedure in the law, and he was rarely reversed by the appellate court. His tirades and tyrannies did not go up, for there were few stenographic records of proceedings in that day. And some Virginia judges, aping the English manner, sat like Jeffreys.

But at the root of him the man was just, and when one came within the law one got his right before him.

He went on: "Here are two men found dead. In the absence of any contradictory witness, the law presumes that they died together. And, therefore, neither one survived to inherit after the other's death."

He pounded on his table with his clenched hand and fixed Colonel Braxton with his eye.

"Now, sir, listen to me! If you can show me any evidence to indicate that one of these men survived the other, even for a moment of life, or if you can show me any evidence to indicate that these two men did not fire at the same instant of time, I will send your case to the jury. For I stand, sir, on the law, and I hold the province of the jury to be as inviolate as my own. If there be such evidence, the case is theirs and they take it, and I sit here to see that right enforced if I sit till Doomsday. But if

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there be no such evidence, then the case is for me to decide, and I will direct a verdict and bring it to an end. But I will not hear *opinion*."

He paused.

"And now, sir, call your witness and show me that these two men did not fire together and did not die together . . . There's my legal challenge to you!"

"And I accept that challenge," replied Colonel Braxton.

Mr. Dabney Mason turned in his seat, like one struck sharply.

Colonel Braxton, moving into action, never failed to interest; and in this case the interest was acute. But in what manner could the man take up this challenge? What evidence had he to offer? He had taken the case without preparation. He could have interviewed no witness, except his client — and what could she know?

He included Miss Lesa Lewis within the sweep of his eye, and his pulse quickened. The torpid interest of the large audience filling the courtroom leaped like a flame from its smoldering ashes.

Colonel Braxton bowed formally to Coleman Northcote, the opposing counsel, to the jury, and to the irate judge.

"Your Honor," he said, "I thank you for this legal challenge, and I shall meet it squarely. I will show Your Honor that these two shots were *not* fired together, and that these two men did *not* die together, as your rule of law presumes."

He passed his big hand over his face, lifted his great shoulders, and looked up at the judge.

"Furthermore, I can name the one who died last. It was the younger nephew, from whom my client here inherits. Let me reconstruct the scene, and after that I will introduce the evidence to prove it."

He closed his eyes, as though to summon up a vision, then opened them slowly and continued:

"We know that the elder of these men was in the drawing-room with the long-barreled pistol, for he was found dead there with that weapon in his hand, and that the younger one was found in the library, fallen in a chair with the big-calibered revolver on the floor beside him.

"Now, this, Your Honor, is what happened on that night: When these two men faced each other, the elder fired first. But he did not kill his opponent in the library. He gave him a deadly wound, from which he eventually died, but he did not die at once. He did not even fall when the bullet struck. He staggered a step or two away from the table where he stood, recovered his balance, and, firing, killed the elder man instantly with a bullet through the heart. And still the younger man did not fall. He returned to the table, sat down there in the chair, and finally died, the revolver slipping out of his hand to the floor . . . Therefore he survived, and therefore Miss Lesa Lewis takes this estate!"

He turned to Mr. Coleman Northcote, with a courteous gesture.

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"You will not contend, sir, that any specific period of time is requisite to establish a legal survivorship? Before the law, in such a case, all periods of time, long or short, are of an equal value?"

Mr. Coleman Northcote replied with no equivocation.

"The period of survivorship is irrelevant," he said, "but the fact of survivorship is vital, and it must be proved. No mere hypothesis can prove it. If you have any evidence, sir, to support your theory, produce it."

The irate old judge interrupted.

"That's the very point," he cried. "The devil take theories! Call your witness!"

"My witness," replied Colonel Braxton, "is already here."

He indicated the sheet of glass in its frame before him.

And then he did an inexplicable thing.

He took up a heavy metal inkstand and went over to the window beside the judge. He struck a pane of glass in the window and it cracked with some half-dozen fractures. Then, twelve inches to the right, he struck the glass again, and a second series of fractures spread.

"Now, Your Honor," he said, "you will observe that at the first blow the fractures in this glass extend uninterrupted to their termini. But the fractures from the second blow stop sharply when they extend into any one of the cracks *already in the glass.* Therefore, Your Honor, one can always tell, when a sheet of glass is fractured by *two* blows, which one of them was first and which one of them was second in point of time."

The illustration was visible and clear.

The stupidest spectator in the courtroom could see the facts: At the first blow the cracks in the glass would have nothing to oppose them and would run their way clear to where they tailed out. But the cracks from any blow after that would stop wherever they touched any fracture already in the glass.

Colonel Braxton came back to his table and took up the sheet of glass.

"Your Honor," he continued, "there are two bullet holes in this glass about a foot apart. The one to the right was made by the single-shot pistol, for it is a small hole corresponding to the small caliber of that weapon, while the one to the left was made by the revolver, for it is a big hole corresponding to the big caliber of that weapon.

"And, Your Honor" — he now addressed the judge directly — "the small-calibered pistol was fired first, because, you will observe, all the cracks radiating from that hole run out unbroken to the very frame of the door. And the revolver was fired later, because all the cracks from that hole break off short when they reach any radiating fracture from the first shot."

He paused, while the interest of the silent courtroom deepened.

"Therefore, Your Honor," he went

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on, "the older man in the drawing-room of this tragic house fired first, and after that the younger one returned the fire. . . . There was, then, a difference in time between these two shots. . . . Now, can we tell how much difference in time?"

He moved a little, changing his posture behind the table.

"I think we can get some idea of it. These two men aimed each at the heart. They were about the same height; consequently, if they had fired together the two bullets would have crashed through this glass at practically the same point. But we find the two shot-holes separated by a considerable distance — to be accurate, some twelve inches. Therefore, as the elder man in the drawing-room fired first, the younger man in the library, after he was wounded, lived long enough to move over two paces to the right, fire, and kill his opponent. And then, after his opponent was dead, for the big revolver bullet went true through the heart, this wounded man with the pistol bullet in his chest lived long enough to move *back* to the table and sit down in the chair in which he died. Therefore, Your Honor, it is certain that the younger man in the library survived the older man in the drawing-room."

There was utter silence, as though a miracle had been wrought.

No man in the crowded courtroom moved. The girl was like a painted picture illumined with the sun; Mr. Dabney Mason stood in wonder as before some marvel of a genie in a tale of the Arabian Nights.

Mr. Coleman Northcote made a hopeless gesture.

Then through the silence boomed the voice of the judge, big, dominant, awakening the courtroom into life.

"The case can go to the jury," he said.

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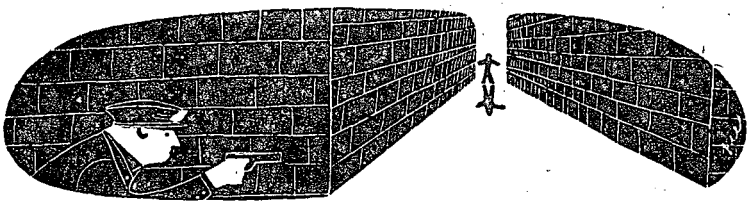

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **HENRY SLESAR**

TITLE: ***M Is for the Many***

TYPE: Crime Story

LOCALE: A city in the United States

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *Jackie got a parole after serving three years. He was only twenty, but he must have been born old . . . . A fascinating story by one of the most promising new writers in the field.*

WHEN YOU SAW HIM FROM across the street, he was an old man walking up and down in front of the row of brownstone houses, trying to make out the faded numerals over the doorways. But if you stepped out of the night and asked him for a match, you'd be startled at the youthful face revealed by the flare. He was a boy, only twenty years old.

He went up the stairs quickly, brushing back the straight blond hair from his forehead, and centering the knot of his tie. He peered at the row of tenants' names, and then pressed the button clearly marked: *COLLINS.*

The door went *chuk-chuk* and he pushed it open. A man's voice on the upper floor called down to him.

"Who is it?"

"Mrs. Collins up there?"

"Yeah. Who wants her?"

The boy swallowed, and his hand gripped the plump wooden knob of the railing. "I'm—I'm a friend of Allie's."

A pause. "Okay. Come on up."

He found himself facing an open door with the light shining and warm behind it. A thick-chested man in shirt sleeves, with close-cropped black hair, admitted him.

"Come in," the man said, rolling down the sleeves and buttoning them carefully. "I'm Allie's brother, Ralph. He probably told you about me."

"Yes." The boy lowered his eyes. "My name's Jackie Smith." He looked up once more and studied the man's face, searching it for some-

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thing. It was a placid face, the lips full and red. It might have been almost effeminate, if it wasn't for the heavy shadow of stubborn beard. "Is Mrs. Collins here?"

"Yeah, she's in the bedroom." Ralph lifted a pearl-gray tie from the back of an armchair and slipped it around his neck. "I was just going," he said. "You couldn't have come at a better time. Ma's feeling pretty lonely—it'll be nice for her to have someone to talk to." He looked at the boy shrewdly. "How old are you, Jackie?"

"Twenty." He flushed.

"How long a stretch did you pull?"

"Five years. I got my parole after three."

"Uh-uh." Ralph preened in front of an ancient mirror on the wall. "What kind of a rap, Jackie?"

"Armed robbery."

"Stick-up?"

"No! I mean—not my part of it. I just drove a car."

"Tough luck. Other guys get it, too?"

"Yeah—ten to fifteen years. I got off easiest. It was my first offense, and I was only seventeen—"

"Not bad," Ralph grinned, and Jackie didn't know if the grin was meant for the image in the mirror or for Jackie's good luck with the law.

A door opened behind them, and a short, stout woman with curly white hair entered the room. She looked at Ralph first, and then at the visitor. Her features were small and dainty, but her cheeks were full and flushed as from the heat of a kitchen stove.

"Ma," Ralph said, "meet Jackie Smith. He's a pal of Allie's."

"Well! What a surprise!" the old lady said. She came toward him so relentlessly that Jackie took a step backward. But when she put out both her hands, in a graceful gesture, he reached out and took them, and even returned her gentle pressure.

Ralph grinned at the picture they made, then went to the door. "See you later," he told them, and left.

"Now!" Mrs. Collins guided him to a downy sofa. "Let's sit and chat, Jackie. I want to know everything."

The boy cleared his throat. "Well, Allie's fine, Mrs. Collins, just fine. He's working in the library now—that's a real good assignment. But he probably wrote you all about that—"

"Yes, he did. And he wrote me all about *you*, Jackie, and what a good friend you've been. He likes you very much . . ."

"Gosh, Mrs. Collins—"

"There. There it is!" the old lady said brightly. "That shy look of yours. Just the way Allie told me. You know, Jackie, you remind me of Allie, just a little. Did you know that?"

"Well . . . not exactly."

"But you *do*. Or maybe it's only your age, or the way your hair keeps falling into your eyes." She looked at him, her eyes soft. Then she stood up briskly. "But what am I doing? I'll bet you haven't eaten yet!"

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"No, really. I'm not hungry."

"Nonsense! A boy's always hungry. Even Ralph, and *he's* thirty-five! You know, it's just *barely* possible there's a piece of apple pie left in the oven. Just barely, mind you. Would you like that, Jackie?"

"Well . . ."

"Don't say *another* word. I'll see if that big ox of a son of mine has eaten it all up. You wait here."

She bustled out toward the kitchen.

Jackie looked around him for the first time. It was a cozy room, wallpapered in an elaborate flower design. The furniture was old but in spotless condition. It was indisputably a home—a real home.

Mrs. Collins returned with a heavy-laden tray. The slab of apple pie was the thickest and hottest and crispest that Jackie had ever seen. The tall glass of milk was so cold that the glass had frosted over completely. There was a soft white napkin, with a blue-monogrammed *J*, and a heavy silver-plated fork.

The old lady watched the boy attack the pie, and her eyes were misty. "You haven't even noticed," she said.

"What, ma'am?" He looked up with pie crumbs falling out of his mouth.

"The napkin. The monogram could be yours, Jackie."

He looked at it stupidly.

"It's Allie's," she said softly. "His full name is John Allan Collins. But his—his friends preferred to call him Allie." She bit her lip.

For some reason, he said: "I'm sorry, Mrs. Collins."

"Don't be. I'm used to the idea now. It's been four years, Jackie—four years without my baby."

He pushed the empty plate aside and looked guilty. "Guess I was hungry," he admitted.

"It did me good to see it." The old lady patted his hand. "You have no idea how much good, Jackie."

He sat in silence for a moment, then stood up.

"Well—"

"You're not going?"

"Well, I thought—I mean, I don't want to bust in, Mrs. Collins. I thought I'd come by and just say hello and bring you Allie's regards. I mean, Allie used to talk about you a lot."

"Did he? Did he really?" She picked up the napkin—it was still unused—and crumpled it in her small hand. "It's wonderful to hear that—to know that he thinks of his mother. Surrounded by all those rough men, those terrible cutthroats—"

Jackie bowed his head.

"Oh, I didn't mean you, Jackie. Not *you*. You're more like my boy. Just an innocent child—caught in an awful web. I'm glad you're away from all that, Jackie."

He hitched his tie. "Well . . ."

"Where are you going now?"

"Dunno. Look for a place to live, I guess. You see, I just got into the city—"

She put out her hand. "Jackie—"

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"Yes, ma'am?"

"Nothing."

He started for the door, then turned. "Mrs. Collins. Could I come back sometime—to see you again?"

She walked toward him. "Jackie—do you have any family?"

"No, ma'am."

"Would you like to stay here, Jackie? With me? In Allie's room?"

"Gosh, Mrs. Collins—"

"Nothing could make me happier, Jackie. Nothing!"

He chewed his lip. "Maybe so," he said, and suddenly he seemed even younger. "Maybe that wouldn't be a bad idea, Mrs. Collins. I'll pay you rent, of course—soon's I get work—"

"We can talk about that later, Jackie. Just say yes now. That's all I ask—just say yes."

"Gosh, Mrs. Collins. All right. Yes."

Ralph helped him find a job, and he was pleased with it. He became a boy-of-all-work in a downtown lumber yard, and he enjoyed the clean smell of the pine boards, the sound of the spinning blade when it bit sharply into the yellow wood. Nobody seemed to know or care about his prison record; they just liked the way he hopped when they said "Hop!"

Mrs. Collins fixed up his room just great; he found himself envying Allie, and wondering what had made him commit the crime that had taken away all this comfort and warm security.

One night he asked her.

The old lady gazed at an ornately framed grandmotherly portrait on the opposite wall before she answered.

"I don't really know," she sighed. "I wish I knew the answer. It was his friends, I guess. This neighborhood isn't what it used to be." She patted his hand and smiled thinly. "And what about you, son? What made you do what you did?"

He was taken by surprise. "Gosh. I don't really know either, Mrs. Collins. Same sort of thing, I guess. Only I didn't really know the guys who pulled that—who did the robbery. One of my friends, a kid named Willie Mybrow, he introduced me to them. He told me there wasn't anything to it—all I had to do was drive a car for half an hour."

She clucked sadly. "Yes. It always seems so terribly innocent . . ."

"I didn't even know what they intended to do. Oh, I mean I knew it was something crooked." He pushed back a lock of hair. "Only I didn't figure it was as big as that—a bank, I mean."

"You poor boy! How old were you?"

"Seventeen."

Her eyes were distant. "My John was only eighteen when they came and arrested him."

She stood up.

"Let's not be in the dumps," she said, with forced cheerfulness. "I've got no time for that sort of thing. I've got a big boy to feed!"

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She went toward the kitchen, humming softly to herself.

That night they had a huge fresh fruit salad with great chunks of succulent pineapple, thick slices of turkey with rich brown gravy, creamy mashed potatoes, and strawberry shortcake. Jackie dug into the meal with evident pleasure, and Mrs. Collins sat at the end of the table with her hands folded under her chin, beaming.

After dinner he offered to wash the dishes, but she chased him out of the kitchen with a flick of the dish towel. He went into the living room and smoked the curved briar pipe Ralph had bought for him, and watched television for a while. Then Ralph arrived, and the three of them spent the rest of the evening playing gin rummy. Mrs. Collins won, and was as delighted as a little girl. But she fought about taking the forty cents that Ralph and Jackie owed her; they laughed heartily at her naïve stubbornness.

Two months later the lumber yard raised his salary to fifty-five dollars a week. It was more money than he had ever earned before. He ran to the Collins home with the news, and told Allie's mother that he would start paying for his room and board at the rate of ten dollars a week. She looked startled when he made the suggestion, and led him into the living room.

"Look, Jackie," she said slowly. "I want you to do me a favor."

"Anything!"

"You won't like this favor. It will hurt your pride. But I want you to forget about such things as paying for room and board. Not just for now. For good. At least, until Allie comes back home . . ."

"But Mrs. Collins—"

"Ma," she said. "Remember, Jackie. You promised."

"Ma," he said shyly, "I can't go on this way. I'm costing you money. It's not fair."

"You don't know how fair it is, Jackie. You're giving me something more precious than money. If you were to start paying me—well, I don't know. It might change things. Do you see what I mean?"

"Yes," he said unhappily. Then he brightened. "But I'll tell you what. The least you can do is help me celebrate. I'll take you out to dinner tonight!"

"What?"

"I mean it! We'll go to a restaurant on Broadway. We'll let somebody else do the cooking for a change! How would you like that?"

She laughed. "All right, Jackie. If it will make you happy."

"It will. It will, Ma!"

She put on her best clothes, and looked as sweet and charming as only a woman of her age and disposition could. Jackie held her arm like a chivalrous beau, and they even took a taxi to the restaurant. The food wasn't as good as Ma's own cooking, but it was the principle of the thing. The two of them had a wonderful time.

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On a sweltering afternoon in early August the owner of the lumber yard, a Greek with a formidable mustache, said:

"Too hot, too hot, Jackie. What do you say? You and me—we close up the place and take the day off. Hah?"

"Gee. That would be swell, Mr. Demitrios!"

He hurried home, half trotting all the way. But he decided to make a stop at the supermarket before going upstairs. He thumped the biggest, greenest watermelons on the counter until he found one to his liking and staggered home under its weight. It was a day for watermelon; Ma would really like it.

He tiptoed up the stairs, intending to surprise her. If he hadn't been so quiet, the voice in the Collins' apartment might not have continued so assuredly. It was a woman's voice high-pitched, and querulous with the heat. Jackie guessed that it was Mrs. Holman, their downstairs neighbor.

She was saying, "But how do you *know*, Mrs. Collins? I mean, I ask you. How do you know? The boy is a convicted criminal, a bank robber!"

Ma's voice: "Mrs. Holman, please!"

Jackie almost dropped the watermelon. The perspiration on his forehead became suddenly cold and unpleasant.

"You're such an innocent, Mrs. Collins. It's nice, don't misunderstand. A person like you. Trusting. Only sometimes, somebody should open your eyes for you. Before it's too late."

"Mrs. Holman, you don't even *know* Jackie."

"*I* don't know him? Listen, I know Jackies. There are Jackies all over the neighborhood. Jackies are going around with switchblades—yes, your Jackies. But to have a Jackie in your *own* house, near your *own* bedroom—" There was a sound, like that of a hand slapping a thigh.

"He's a good boy," Ma said. "He works hard."

"You mean, he's a patient boy," the woman answered. "Smart, but patient. Just waiting, Mrs. Collins. He's not so dumb. He knows you got a couple of dollars saved up. You think he's blind? He *knows*. The groceries don't give food away."

Jackie put his head down until his forehead touched the cool surface of the melon. He rested it there, breathing shallowly, still listening.

"Look, Mrs. Collins. You know me. I'm no big talker. Half the time, I see something funny, I keep my mouth shut. But when I see a nice old lady like you, a lady with plenty of troubles already—"

Jackie drew his breath in sharply. The sound seemed loud to him, so he decided to reveal his presence. He coughed pointedly, then knocked on the partially opened door.

"Who is it?"

"It's me, Ma. Jackie."

"Hush!" he heard Mrs. Collins whisper.

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When he entered, Mrs. Holman smiled at him sweetly, then left with a meaningful glance at the old lady.

He packed that night.

There wasn't much to put into the small, imitation-leather suitcase—a couple of shirts, some sports clothes, some underwear and socks, a beaded belt Ralph had given him, and a few odds and ends.

Then he painfully wrote a note.

Dear Ma,

Think it's about time I was moving on. I've stayed too long already. Thanks for everything. Tell Ralph goodbye for me and—

The pen splintered on the paper, spreading a blot over the words. He cursed, and flung the pen to the floor. Perhaps this was the sound that awakened Mrs. Collins, for in another minute she was rapping quietly on his door.

"Jackie?"

"One minute, Ma."

He slammed the suitcase shut and slid it under the bed. Then he opened the door. "Yes, Ma?"

"Jackie—" Her hand was clutching the collar of her nightgown. "Jackie, what's going on?"

"Nothing, Ma. I—I was just writing a letter."

"A letter? To who?"

"To—Allie. Yeah. I was writing to Allie, telling him how swell you've been to me."

Her eyes explored the room.

"Jackie, are you telling me the truth? It sounded like—" She spotted the half-open drawers of the bureau. "Jackie, you were going to leave!"

"Aw, Ma—"

"It's true, isn't it? You were running away!"

"Well, it's about time, isn't it? You can't keep on supporting me forever!"

"Jackie, don't say that! Haven't you been happy here?"

He was miserable. "Yes. You know that. Only now I have to go. I have to!" He reached under the bed and pulled out the suitcase.

"You can't! You can't leave me!" Her voice quavered.

"Please, Ma. Don't make it worse. This is something I have to do—I have to. I'll—I'll write you."

"But I need you, Jackie! You're all I've got—"

"There's Ralph," he said sullenly, not meaning it that way.

"Ralph . . ." She looked at him strangely. "Yes, Ralph. Wait, Jackie. Please. Don't go away—" She turned and left the room. He looked at the closed door for a while, then finished his packing. He snapped the locks shut with finality. Then he made the bed, carefully, and straightened out the room, just the way it was the first day he had come to the Collins home.

He went into the living room, carrying his suitcase, and his chest pained at the sight of the forlorn woman in the armchair.

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"Ma, please. It's best this way. Honest it is."

"Don't go," she said again.

"I'll never forget what you did. So help me. I—" He struggled for words. "Look, Ma. I was a nothing, a nobody. And you—" His vocabulary was strait-jacketing his emotion. His eyes smarted, and he turned to the door.

It opened before his hand was on the knob. Ralph came in, looking sleepy and irritated.

"What the hell," he said sourly. "What the hell's going on, Jackie?"

"It's nothing, Ralph. Ma's just upset."

"You're telling me! Phoning in the middle of the night—" He looked at the old lady. "What's going on?"

"He's leaving!" she moaned. "Jackie's leaving!"

"That true?"

"Yes. What's wrong with that? I've been sponging on you long enough. Now I'm going!" He picked up the suitcase and started out again.

Ralph's hard hand stopped him. "Now wait a minute. Let's talk this over."

"There's nothing to talk over."

"Tell him!" the old woman wailed. "Tell him about the operation!"

Jackie was stunned. "Operation? What operation?"

"Nuts to the operation!" Ralph reached for the handle of the suitcase. "We've got no time for that phony story, Ma. We waited too long as it is—"

"Ralph!" Mrs. Collins stood up.

"You heard me!" Ralph's unshaved cheek was suddenly close to Jackie's face. "We played with this pigeon long enough. We're not going to *ask* him for anything. We're gonna take it!"

"Ralph, you're making a mistake!" The old woman clenched her hands.

"Shut up!"

"Hey!" Jackie said. "Don't talk to her that way!"

"What's the matter, bright boy? Soft for old ladies?" Ralph laughed with ugly resonance.

"What is this?" Jackie stared at him, then whirled on Mrs. Collins. "Ma, what's he talking about?"

"You know damn well, you little punk!" Ralph's hand closed around the knot of his tie. "You stinking little mamma's boy—"

"Ma!"

"Let him alone, Ralph!" The old lady's voice rose a full octave. "For God's sake, don't do it this way!"

"You got a better way?" Ralph snarled. "My way's best now, Ma. Understand? And *you*, bright eyes —you can start talking right now."

"About what?" Jackie said, trembling in the bigger man's grip.

"About the money! What else! The money you got stashed away—"

"No! No, you're wrong!"

Ralph shoved him backwards, and he fell across the arm of an overstuffed chair. He stepped toward the boy, and Jackie's hand went over his eyes in an instinctive protective gesture.

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"Don't play it cute, Jackie boy. Because Allie told us the straight goods. You and those pals of yours got plenty out of that bank job. The cops got every one of you—but they never got the dough. So it stands to reason *somebody* knows where it is!"

"Allie?" Jackie whispered. "Allie said that?"

Mrs. Collins walked toward him slowly, her eyes gentle and motherly. "Jackie," she coaxed. "Be a good boy. A good boy, Jackie. Tell us where the money is. We'll share it, all of us. We'll share it with you, Jackie . . ."

He looked at her in horror.

"No," he said.

Ralph hit him with a hard, closed fist. The blow landed beneath his right eye, and he could feel the flesh swelling almost instantly. He fell back against the chair, then to the floor. When he got up, his eyes were still on the old woman.

"No," he said.

He was hit again, this time the blow landing deep in his stomach. He screamed with pain, flinging his arms around his middle to contain it.

"Enough, Ralph!" the old lady cried. "Enough!"

But it wasn't enough. In a gray and red fog he saw Ralph's contorted face descending toward him, and then fire flashed in his arm socket. He was spun about, with Ralph behind him, his left hand pinned against his back, the flesh protesting, the muscles stretched almost to the limit of their flexibility. He screamed again, and tears started.

"No!" he shrieked. "No, no, *no!*"

He made a desperate attempt to free himself, and his ability to struggle at all became an advantage. He kicked backward, and the heel of his shoe struck bone. Ralph cursed and let go. Jackie made a dash for the door, but Ralph was there ahead of him, his long arms encircling him like a blacksnake whip. They scuffled in front of the doorway, until an iron tablelamp overturned. The crash startled the older man, and for a moment his grip weakened. Jackie broke away, reached down, then lifted the lamp high—not toward Ralph, but toward the cowering figure of the old woman.

"Another step!" he said, "another step and I kill her!"

Ralph hesitated. Then he scowled and lunged for the boy.

Jackie twisted his body, and the lamp descended in time to meet Ralph's onslaught. The sound of iron against bone was loud in the suddenly still room. The woman made a small noise in her throat, and Ralph staggered and fell.

"My boy," Mrs. Collins wept, "my boy, my boy . . ."

Later, Jackie wondered whom she had meant.

Mr. Foster, the parole officer assigned to his welfare, looked as miserable as Jackie had expected he would. His round, friendly face be-

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hind the wire barrier was a study in dejection, and Jackie could see the enormous sense of personal failure in his eyes.

"I'm sorry, Jackie. That's all I can say."

"I know, Mr. Foster. It's not your fault."

"I believe in you, Jackie. You know that. I believe you had your reasons for hurting that man. Even if you won't talk about them."

"Thanks, Mr. Foster." He fingered the collar of his anonymous coat. "Can you tell me something, Mr. Foster?"

"Sure, Jackie."

"Where will they send me? To the same place?"

"Yes."

He sighed. "That's good."

"Yes, perhaps it is. They know your record there, Jackie. I hope you won't do anything to spoil it. You still have your whole life ahead of you . . ."

The guard was signaling.

"Thanks a lot," Jackie said. "Thanks for everything."

"Make me a promise, Jackie. Behave yourself. Be patient. And above all, don't get bitter."

"Sure, Mr. Foster." He slid off the stool. "I'll be okay. Don't forget, I got some old friends on the inside. Good friends. To tell you the truth, I'm looking forward to seeing them again. One in particular . . ."

He walked off, down the long gray corridor, accompanied by the guard. From the distance he looked like an old man.

Solutions to

WHO KILLED COCK ROBIN, JR.?

Mr. Robert—a bobolink.
Mr. Ember—a phoenix bird.
Homer Sharpe—a Baltimore oriole.
Flo Afton—a nightingale.
E. Allan—a raven.
Icarus—a cedar waxwing.
Miss Dee—a chickadee.

The murderer: E. Allan, the raven. He is the only bird among those present which will kill another bird; also, he was the only bird who did not drink and, therefore, the only one who had his hands free to kill Cock Robin, Jr., while the others carried their drinks down the hall.

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **PAT STADLEY**

TITLE: ***Daddy-O***

TYPE: Juvenile Delinquency

LOCALE: A city in the United States

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *Have you ever seen them in action? The older teen-age boys — the motorcycle gang — in their leather jackets, steel-tipped boots, and tight blue jeans? With their switch-blade knives? With their tough, arrogant insolence? . . . A powerful story with a terrifying beat.*

GLENN PEDERSON SWUNG HIS CAR into the brightly lighted driveway of the skating rink and looked anxiously toward the steps where his daughter usually waited for him. She wasn't there. For a moment uneasiness touched him. Relax, he chided himself. What if you are a half hour late? Sixteen-year-olds never mind that.

But the memory of his wife's voice drifted back to him. "Don't be late, dear. I don't want Bev waiting in front." Well, she wasn't, he thought ruefully; now he'd have to go inside.

He drove slowly down the long rows of cars and parked in the big circle. He got out, still hopefully scanning the walks and empty benches; then he climbed the wide cement stairs, pushed through the big, swinging doors, and stood for a moment. It was another world—a teen-age world—and he hesitated.

It was all movement, all lights, all noise. The teen-agers shifted, formed groups, melted back into twos. There was laughing, hooting, whispering, jam-ups, collisions, little screams, coke bottles, candy wrappers, peanut shells—and over and around it the music roared.

But still no sign of Bev. He edged his way through clusters of girls watching each other, watching the boys; through tight-knit groups of boys watching the girls with arrogant indifference.

Once or twice he thought he saw

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Bev's blonde hair, but when he moved closer it was never she. Finally he stopped one girl whom he thought looked familiar.

"Have you seen Beverly Pederson?" he asked.

"Oh, she left," the girl said. "Half hour ago."

He went back outside and stood for a moment on the steps. It was quiet and peaceful, and the air smelled sweet. He looked at the long rows of silent cars. Maybe Bev had gone home with a friend and he'd missed her. Maybe he ought to call the house. Still, if she weren't home and Mary had left the club meeting early— He quickly put the thought of his wife out of his mind.

Then he saw Bev's skates, her sweater flung carelessly on them, and relief flooded through him. She had to be nearby. He walked along a path, moving rapidly, and down another, and, suddenly, he heard her laugh. He turned. She was at the end of a long paved alley, the soft light from a parking post framing her.

She stood, close beside a motorcycle, her fingers tracing the long steel handles, and she was smiling up into the face of a boy—a tall boy, lean, his dark hair curving down to touch the upturned collar of his leather jacket. He sat slouched in the seat of the motorcycle, his legs sticking outward so that Glenn could see the steel-tipped boots, the tight blue jeans.

Glenn called. Bev looked his way, waved, spoke to the boy, and turned away. The boy reached out, caught her arm, and drew her back slowly. He hunched forward, talking rapidly, his head tipped close to Bev's. Glenn could see his daughter's face —intent, serious. Bev shook her head.

Uneasiness tugged at him. He quickened his step. Then, to the back of him, he heard the sudden roar of motors and jumped as someone yelled at him. Motorcycles whipped past, pinning him securely between them, their wheels spitting little chunks of gravel at him. Then suddenly they were gone, heading for the other boy and Bev, skidding into a wide circle that grew tighter and tighter around the two.

Glenn ran, shouting. They couldn't or wouldn't hear him. He was in a nightmare of lights and dust, and the roar of engines and anger began to burn in him, and a little fear, too. He strained to see Bev. She had drawn closer to the boy beside her, but she didn't seem afraid. Then the cycles stopped abruptly, their back tires fishtailing. He cut through them.

"Get in the car, Bev," he said as quietly as he could. "It's parked in the main circle." She looked up at him, her brown eyes wide, then back at the boy who still held her. He released her slowly.

Easy, Glenn told himself. They're just boys. Shoving a little—but they don't mean any harm.

"Look," he said to the boy. "I

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don't know your name. Maybe hanging on to a girl's arm is the accepted thing nowadays. But I don't care for it with my daughter."

The boy shifted, hooked a thumb in his pocket. "What's so special about *her,*" he said. "You acting like a father or something? I wasn't hurting her."

Someone mimicked. "Oh, Daddy-O!" The crowd snickered.

He looked around him. They *were* kids—seventeen, eighteen—different sizes, different shapes, and yet all alike. Hard young faces, eyes too bright, too knowing; full of muscles, full of toughness. Tough—yes, that was it. What did they call them? Roughs? Hards? Probably a Gang. Well, there must be reason in them, too. He tried again.

"That exhibition certainly displayed lack of responsibility. It wasn't only show-offish, it was dangerous." He felt, rather than heard, the stirring behind him.

The boy in front of him was lighting a cigarette. He held the lighted match upright in front of him as if studying the small flame. But when he looked over at Glenn, his eyes were still cold.

"You complaining?" he asked slowly. "Or is this just your good deed for the day?"

Awareness prickled through Glenn. He looked again over his shoulder. They were still in their circle, still tense. He was no match for them, even if he could remember his old army training.

Still, something ate at him. He stepped closer to the boy and raised his voice so that it came clearly, firmly.

"Stay away from my daughter;" he said and then turned, walking deliberately, ignoring the spraddled legs that forced him to step over. And yet he saw the bright gleam of the steel-tipped boots, the buckles across the instep, could even see the handle of a knife slid down inside one of the boots.

Walk easy, he told himself. He was halfway to the car when he heard the first motor roar. The boy passed twelve inches away from him. The second boy cut the distance in half. He felt the brush of leather from the third.

Glenn squared his shoulders, balancing himself. But he wouldn't turn around. He wouldn't look.

The next boy caught him, spinning him so that he was turned partly toward them. Now two were racing straight at him. They split at the last moment and went around. He saw the wheels tearing at the sand as they spun away from him.

Only the one was left. He drove slowly toward Glenn, and stopped.

Glenn held himself in. "You boys play rough, don't you?"

The boy zippered his jacket slowly. He leaned down and opened his carburetor. Then he looked at Glenn. "Just watch yourself—*Dad,*" he said deliberately. He gunned the machine; it leaped forward. He didn't look at Bev as he passed.

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Glenn walked to the car slowly. Relief had left his muscles quivering and he was breathing hard.

"Who were they, Bev?" he finally asked.

"His name's Rod," she said slowly. "Rod Ramsey. He's a real wheel at school." She was quiet for a moment and then her voice came lightly, wonderingly. "That's the first time he's ever noticed me."

He looked at her. Her eyes were shining.

Glenn didn't sleep much that night. Once he thought he heard the sound of motorcycles and he got up and looked out on the quiet street.

He stood a while, smoking a cigarette. He'd heard and read about boys like Rod but he hadn't believed it. They were somebody else's kids, in some other town. Hell, they weren't even kids—just products of a "too-fast" civilization, spawned from poverty, or racial difficulties, or the wrong living conditions.

And then he remembered them again—in detail. Not these! No poverty here—not with twenty-dollar boots and fifty-dollar leather jackets and six-hundred-dollar motorcycles. And not poor living conditions—there were no tenements in town.

He sighed. Anyway, it wasn't his problem. Bev would never take anyone like Rod Ramsey seriously.

He dawdled over his coffee the next morning, watching Bev as she flew from kitchen, to living room, to bedroom, snatching toast, hunting books, her red hooped skirt swinging, showing the frilly petticoats underneath.

Outside a cowbell clanged. She waved a kiss to him, and ran. Glenn watched the scramble to let her in. A girl took her purse, a boy her books, someone grabbed her sweater, and then they were gone, tires screaming.

"Seems a wild way to drive," he said to Mary.

"Squirrel, I think, is the proper word," she said, smiling.

He grinned back, but his facial muscles seemed stiff. "Mary, what kind of boys is Bev dating?"

"Oh," she looked thoughtful. "They seem pretty nice. They're noisy, of course. They've got crazy haircuts. They blow the horn instead of coming to the door. Why? You've met most of them."

"Nothing, only we really don't *know* any of these boys." He paused, but he could still see the shine in Bev's eyes.

"Honey," he said suddenly, "how about letting Bev have a small party this weekend. Say Saturday night."

Mary looked at him, her head tipped to one side. "Dancing? Rock and Roll?"

He groaned. "Even that," he said. "I'll hide in the study."

He worked late Saturday. It was eight thirty when he left the office, but still too early to go home. Bev's

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party would be just beginning—or "jumping," he thought wryly. Well, he'd have coffee and a sandwich first.

He went into the little corner eating place. Tim, the cook-owner, greeted him happily. "Evening, Mr. Pederson. You're headed home a little late, aren't you?"

Glenn nodded. "Give me a hamburger, Tim. No onions. And coffee. Daughter's having a party."

Tim smiled sympathetically. "I know," he said. "Mine had one a month ago. Thought the roof would cave in. All that rhythm and blues stuff!" He snapped his fingers. "Kinda catchy, in a way, though."

He slapped the meat on the griddle, where it began to hiss quietly. He poured Glenn's coffee. "'Course we had swing in our time. And before that the Lindy Hop and the Charleston and the Bunny Hug." He shook his head. "Yep, we had our moments!"

He flipped the meat expertly, laid a row of tomatoes on the bun. "Still it seems to me kids are crazier than ever nowadays. Maybe I'm getting old. But take my daughter's party. It was going real nice and then kids began coming from everywhere. Called it a 'crash party'."

"Everywhere?" Glenn asked. "You mean, they came without invitations?"

"Sure. Don't need one to a crash party. Seems a bunch of kids get in their cars and they cruise around until they find a party going and then they just barge right in. We didn't have any real trouble but my neighbor down the road had to call the police when his kid had a shindig."

Glenn picked up the hamburger. "Think I'll eat this on the way, Tim."

Tim nodded. "Night, Mr. Pederson."

Glenn drove rapidly. He tried to eat but somehow the hamburger didn't taste right. He finally threw it away. When he entered his street he slowed down. There was the usual assortment of cut-down jalopies, brightly painted hot-rods, and flashy convertibles. They seemed normal enough. There was a light burning on his front porch and the house looked happy and gay.

He swung into his driveway and then he saw the cycles. They had parked them, three in a row, across the driveway. There was no way around them. He stopped, climbed out, his pulse suddenly hammering. Not that crowd. Not Rod Ramsey. Bev wouldn't—

He let himself in the front door and the noise and the laughter hit him. He walked down the hall to the open doorway of the living room and halted. Music spilled around him, loud and mocking, the drumbeat steady and insistent. Boys and girls stood in small groups or leaned against the wall. Some sat on the floor, their hands beating in rhythm. But only two were dancing. Bev and Rod.

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It was like a big fist slamming at him. He could feel it in the pit of his stomach, in his forehead.

But he could only stare. Gone were the jeans, the boots, the leather jacket, replaced by black pegged trousers, a white shirt opened at the throat, and soft loafer shoes. But the arrogance, the insolence still showed in the set of the boy's head, in the tight, hard lines of his face.

Bev had kicked off her shoes and she whirled and bounced, kicked and snapped her fingers in graceful abandonment to the demand of the drums and the invitation of Rod's outflung hand.

Then Glenn saw the other two boys. They were watching him, their chairs tilted back against the wall, their eyes taunting. And, as he stood there, one lifted his cigarette and deliberately flicked the ashes to the floor.

Anger trembled in Glenn, tightening the muscles along his shoulders. He stepped forward. Mary caught him, her fingers holding his arm, gently yet firmly. He looked at her, meeting the strong appeal in her eyes. He hesitated. She pulled him toward the kitchen.

He shut the door behind him, "Who let them in?" he demanded, his voice breaking, sliding down into harshness.

"I did." There was a catch in her breathing. "I thought maybe Bev had invited someone new—they seemed so sure of themselves. Besides, she seemed to know them. It isn't that they've done anything. They haven't! It's just that—" She shivered.

"I'll get them out," he promised. "You stay in here. Get the food ready. I'll ease them out."

She reached again for him, her eyes enormous. "Please, Glenn. Be careful. Maybe you should let them stay as long as they're behaving."

He didn't answer. When he got back to the living room, the music was still beating against the walls and most of the kids were dancing—stomping, whirling, the floor trembling under them.

But Bev and Rod were gone. He looked quickly for the other boys. Their chairs were empty too.

He went to the front door and opened it. Bev stood outside, away from the porch light. Rod leaned indolently against the wall, his arms folded in front of him. Bev was talking, her words a low murmur.

Glenn moved toward them. Then he was aware of the shadowy figures of the other two boys. They stood apart, only the red eyes of their cigarettes moving slightly. He walked past them without turning.

"Beverly," he called, his voice harsher than he meant it to be, "go join your guests in the house."

She turned, her eyes startled. "Dad!"

"Did you invite these boys to your party?"

"Well, no, but—"

"Then go inside where you belong!"

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She gave him one look, her eyes accusing, then ran suddenly toward the front door.

Rod still leaned against the wall. "You still playing the father role?" he asked mildly.

"Get going," Glenn said.

"Supposing I'm not ready to leave?"

Glenn reached for him but he never touched the white shirt. The blow caught him from behind. Blackness swirled around him, then receded. They held him up, one of his arms pinned behind him, the wrist twisted upward. He could feel the muscles straining, the pain washing through him.

There was excitement in their voices. "Shall we rough him up a little, Rod?"

Rod's eyes were dark, mocking. "Let him go," he said. The sudden release made Glenn dizzy. For a wild moment he thought he'd be sick. He desperately fought it down.

Rod's voice came through to him, flat, unemotional. "I warned you before. Don't force it."

Glenn straightened himself, pain still eating at his shoulder. When he spoke his voice was harsh and coarse, not his own.

"Get out of here," he said, "and stay away from Bev. She's not your kind."

Something flickered in Rod's eyes. The skin drew tautly across his face. "You keep asking for it, you're going to get it." He turned and walked toward the motorcycles. The other two trailed slowly behind him.

Suddenly one of them leaned down, wrapped his gloved hands around the trunk of a rosebush, and pulled. It came out of the ground with a tearing sound. He turned and flung it at Glenn.

"Here," he said, "take some roses in the house. Doll it up a little." Only the roar of their motors finally drowned their laughter.

Glenn stood a long moment, sucking in fresh air, rubbing his arm, until the anger quieted and he could cover it up before he faced Mary.

The music was still roaring when he got inside. He looked in the living room for a moment but when Bev saw him, she turned away.

He went into the study and picked up the phone. He'd call the police and report the incident. Report what? He'd sent some boys home from his daughter's party and they had torn up a rosebush? That would sound pretty silly. He could see the policeman's curious eyes.

You say, Mr. Pederson, they pulled up a rosebush? And what else, Mr. Pederson? Were they loud, unruly? Did they force their way in? Did they break up the party? No? Then —you mean just the rosebush! Oh. Well, Mr. Pederson, that seems more like a childish prank—

Childish! he would say; *yes, but they didn't do it like children!*

He put the phone down.

He was glad when the party was over. He helped Mary clear away

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the dishes, his mind turning over and over. He had to get through somehow to Bev and explain. But she had met each overture with silence.

Finally he called her into the living room. She came reluctantly.

"Bev."

She looked past him, studying the books on the shelf.

"I had to do what I did tonight."

"Why?" She flung at him. "They weren't doing anything wrong."

"In the first place they came when they weren't invited."

"But everybody does that. *Everybody* crashes parties!"

He tried again. "Bev, he just isn't the right type of boy for you."

"How do you know? And the way you treated me—like I was twelve years old." She burst into tears. "He'll never speak to me again!"

Glenn drew a long breath. "You aren't to have anything more to do with him, Bev. Is that understood?"

She looked at him, her eyes wet with tears. "You don't understand—" she sobbed. "You're just like everyone else. And I thought you were different!" She ran from the room. They listened to her footsteps down the hall, the slam of her door.

He turned to Mary. "How," he asked, "how can she see anything in that boy?"

"I don't know, Glenn." Mary's voice was troubled. "Maybe it's because he's good-looking—or different from most boys she knows. Or because he's eighteen and she's sixteen—and it's exciting."

Exciting. That was the word. He remembered again the shine of their eyes when he stood inside their circle, the quick suck of their breath when he threatened, the tremor in their voices as they held him pinioned against the wall. Was this what they lived on? Excitement? Even his own child?

"Let's go to bed." Mary's voice was tired. "I'll talk to Bev tomorrow."

He did all the usual things mechanically. But only when he locked the front door did he begin to feel relaxed. He stood for a moment, holding the key in his fingers. He was right, wasn't he? Each man protects his own?

The week dragged. Bev was courteous, but quiet, withdrawn. He didn't mention Rod to her again. And, suddenly, it was Friday. When he reached home that night, Bev was gone.

"She's spending the night at the Carver's," Mary explained. "Nancy got a new convertible for her birthday and they're going skating."

He was restless, so he suggested a show, and after that a hamburger at a drive-in. It was eleven thirty when he finally turned the car homeward. "Let's drive by Nancy's and see if the girls are home," he suggested. Mary nodded her head.

But there was no bright red convertible in the driveway and they

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could see through the open door that the garage was empty.

"Maybe they're at our house," he said and quickened the pressure against the gas pedal. But their house was dark, too.

Mary's voice trembled. "Darling, maybe we should drive by the skating rink. They could have had a flat tire or run out of gas—"

"Honey," Glenn soothed. "Don't begin fretting. They're probably eating at the drive-in. After all, twelve isn't late to them."

"I guess not," she said slowly. "Still—"

"Look, you put some coffee on. I'll drive by the skating rink and look for the car."

"I'll come with you."

"No!" His voice was suddenly sharp. He softened it. "If they're having trouble with the car, they'll want to call. You should be near the phone. I'll be right back." He kissed her quickly.

He swung again past Nancy's—hoping. Still no lights. But the skating rink was as bright and jammed as before. He drove slowly up and down the rows of automobiles. Nancy's car was not there.

He made the full turn again, letting his car creep down the long aisles. Once his headlights flared down the alley with its lonely lamppost at the end. It was silent and empty now. He forced Rod's face from his mind.

He drove quickly to the biggest drive-in. Long lines of cars jammed the entrance, so he parked and walked. They weren't here either. Finally he called home.

Mary answered the second ring. "Glenn? No, they aren't here. I've called Nancy's a dozen times. Her parents aren't home yet." Her voice was trembling again. "You don't think—"

"Accident?" Glenn cut in hurriedly. "Of course not, Mary. They're probably headed for home now, and I've just been missing them. Keep the coffee hot. I'll check once more and then come home."

He returned to the skating rink, drove around, and came in from the back.

Maybe I didn't look hard enough, he thought. So he circled the block again and on a quiet back street he saw the new red convertible. He parked his own car behind it and got out. Neither girl was there.

The new car was locked. He went back and got his flashlight. Surely the girls wouldn't park this far away and walk to the rink. Still, everything seemed normal. He let the flashlight play over the seats, the floors, the tires.

He heard the police car whine to a stop beside him and was suddenly silhouetted in their spotlight. He turned, facing the man who slid quickly from the car.

"Hello, officer," he said. "I was just checking—"

The officer's face was impassive, his voice formal. "May I see your driver's license?"

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Glenn fumbled with his wallet, opened it to the folder, and held it out. The officer squinted at it.

"You're Mr. Pederson?"

"Yes."

"This your car?"

"No, sir. It belongs to Nancy Carver." The words tumbled from him. "My daughter was spending the night with her and they weren't home yet—they went skating. I came down to see if they were having trouble with the car."

"If they were skating, Mr. Pederson, why is the car a block away from the rink parking lot?"

"I don't know," Glenn said and he could hear the fear well up into his voice.

For a moment the officer studied him, then he walked to the patrol car and stood talking to the policeman behind the wheel. Their voices drifted back to Glenn. "It's locked. Parked good. No tire trouble."

Finally they beckoned to him and when he reached them, their voices were warmer. "Do you think the girls might have joined another group and gone to eat somewhere?"

Glenn shook his head. "I don't think so." Think, his mind taunted; a week ago you would have *known*.

"Do you want us to put a call out?"

Glenn shook his head. "No. I don't believe anything has happened. I'll wait here for them."

He felt old and tired as he walked back to his car. The patrol car waited until he had climbed inside, then made a wide circle and pulled away.

He sat hunched in the seat. He should call Mary, but what could he tell her? Suppose the girls came back while he was gone—he'd only have frightened Mary needlessly. And so he sat there. Twice the patrol car swung back. He blinked his lights at them each time.

At two o'clock he heard the motorcycles long before he saw them. They came racing down the street, five abreast. When they saw his car, they cut toward him, racing throttle open, motors roaring only to skid away, circle and race toward him again.

He looked for Bev. And then out of the darkness came the last cycle. It shot between two, weaved, skidded to the middle, leaned to one side, and stopped short. Blood pounded in Glenn.

He watched the boy twist in his seat, slip an arm around the figure behind him, and lift her. She swung clear, stood clinging to him, and then she put her head back, the blonde hair swinging, and laughed.

Glenn breathed hard, felt the fear in him suddenly shift and dissolve. He found himself walking toward them, his legs moving automatically.

It was quiet now. Above them shone the single street lamp, twisting their shadows grotesquely. He thought he could hear the sound of the lightning bugs as they hurled themselves against the glass.

A cycle moved in front of him, but he walked around it; a foot

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reached out to trip him, but he stepped over it; someone caught at his coat, holding it until the pocket tore. Then he was close to Bev and Rod.

"Dad!" Bev's voice was thin. Glenn searched his daughter's face. It was flushed, defiant, yet strangely young and vulnerable.

"Dad—" She put a hand toward him.

"Get away, Bev," he said and his voice was cold.

She looked at him, shock in her eyes. Some hand—a girl's, Glenn thought—reached out for her and pulled her away.

Glenn took off his coat, tossed it away from him.

"Well, Daddy-O!" someone called. They all snickered. Only Rod was quiet, his face scornful.

"He wants to fight, Rod. Daddy-O's gonna teach you somethin'." He could hear the excitement growing. Their circle shifted, eddied, moved inward.

"Here, Pops, show us how to use a knife!"

He watched it loop through the air toward him, the slim blade flashing in the light. It dropped clattering, lay spinning. He kicked at it. It slid away, lost in the circle of feet.

"Chicken?" Rod taunted, his voice mocking.

They whooped now, pounding each other, shoving.

How do you get through, he thought. How do you reach this boy? He moved toward Rod. The crowd quieted instantly.

"What makes your kind tick, Rod?" he asked. "That knife, the jacket, the boots? Or this? This piece of motor?" He placed a foot against the gleaming black cycle. He could hear their quick suck of air. "If I take it from you, what are you, Rod?" He gave a shove. The cycle rocked, tipped heavily, then fell.

He saw the flare of anger in Rod's eyes. He heard the others close in behind him.

"I'm asking for it, Rod. Remember?"

He thought he was ready. He ducked, but Rod's fist caught him, landed solidly. He flicked out a left—missed. He saw the next one coming, rolled with it. He moved in, crouching. Rod caught him on the chin. Lights flashed for a moment. He shook his head.

He rushed him then, his fists hammering through Rod's defense, smashing heavily against the chest. Rod backed away. Glenn followed, saw his mistake too late, and took a vicious one-two punch. He felt them down to his feet.

The boy can fight, he thought. Where did he learn? *Learn.* And suddenly reality dropped away. He was no longer Glenn Pederson, age thirty-eight, adult, fighting an eighteen-year-old boy. He was twenty again and somewhere a sergeant's voice was hammering at him. He reached up, took the arm that flashed

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toward him, twisted, felt it against his shoulder, and heaved.

Rod's body curved upward and away from him. He heard him yell, saw him hit the pavement and roll. For one brilliant, light-splashed moment he stood and looked at them.

"Come on, punks," he sneered. "Who's next?"

They hit him, together. He struggled to stay upright, lashing out as fast as he could, until sheer weight dragged him down. He saw a boot as it aimed toward him, grabbed, his fingers straining and tearing. Somewhere a girl screamed. And then blackness flooded over him . . .

The lights hurt his eyes. He tried to turn away, felt himself being held. Somewhere he could hear Beverly crying. He opened his eyes.

There was an officer kneeling by him, a firm hand on his shoulder. "Better stay quiet."

"I'm all right," he answered. "Help me up." They lifted him to his feet. Across from him he could see the boys, grouped together. An officer was taking names. They were answering sullenly, staring past the officer at him. He looked for Rod, saw him seated in the patrol car. Suddenly weariness settled over him.

"May I take my daughter home?" he asked. "And Nancy."

The officer nodded. "You'll have to come in tomorrow. Sign the complaint."

Glenn beckoned to the two girls. They walked beside him, their faces white, frightened. "You drive your car," he said to Nancy. "We'll follow you."

He watched Bev get in the car. He wanted to touch her, yet something prevented him. He didn't feel brave, or angry, or even adult. Adult? Where had been the adult in him?

He watched Nancy pull her car into the driveway, saw the door to her house open, and light rush out. Her parents are home, he thought; she's safe.

Then they were in their drive and Mary was standing in the kitchen doorway and Bev opened the car door and ran, flinging herself at her mother.

He drove the car into the garage, closed and locked the door, and walked slowly to the house. How safe it looked, how warm the lights were as he entered. He stood still a moment, his eyes loving the bright, cheerful kitchen, the empty cups on the table. He closed and locked the door. And now, he thought, mine are safe.

He went into the living room drawn by the murmur of voices. Mary looked at him, her eyes big. Bev sat on the floor, her head buried in her mother's lap.

"Bev—" he said and stopped. Not tonight. Tomorrow will be time enough, he thought. Tomorrow I can think. Tomorrow I can *prove* to Bev.

But she had heard him and had lifted her head.

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"I was so afraid, Dad," she whispered, "so afraid for you."

"It's all right, Pony," he said gently.

"It didn't seem wrong," she said, her voice breaking. "It was fun. I'd never been on a motorcycle."

"Just forget it, honey. It's all over."

"Dad," her eyes were enormous. "What will they do to him—to Rod?"

"I don't know," he replied slowly.

She was silent a long moment. "Couldn't you help him, Dad? He'll need somebody."

Glenn looked past her to Mary. He sighed. "I'll try," he said.

He walked to the closet and took down a jacket.

Mary ran to him. "Not now, Glenn. You don't have to go now!"

He touched her face. How could he tell her that it had to be now? For Bev's sake. "Take care of our girl," he said.

He saw the boys first as he entered the police station. They were seated on a long bench that ran the length of the wall. One of them nudged Rod.

He approached the sergeant at the desk.

"Yes, sir, what can I do for you?"

The words didn't come easily. "I'm here about the boys. I'd like to see if I—" he stopped.

The officer waited. The boys on the bench leaned forward, their boots scraping against the floor.

"Well, I thought there might be something I can do."

"I see," the officer paused. "Are you one of the fathers?"

Glenn stared at him. Father? Father to whom? To Beverly, yes. But her name was Pederson. He looked at the boys. Was that where it stopped? With the name?

He looked at the the boys again. They stared at him, their heads lifted, their eyes defiant. He searched the face of each of them. And finally he looked at Rod.

"Yes," he said and his voice was very clear. "Some boys have two fathers. I'm theirs. They call me Daddy-O."

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